

THEORIES OF
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

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Theories of Religious Experience

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JAMES,
OTTO AND BERGSON

By
JOHN MORRISON MOORE
Hamilton College



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To
MY MOTHER AND FATHER

RELIGION - Methodist World Service Fund

1913

PREFACE

No term has been more frequently employed in recent religious discussion than the phrase "religious experience." The view that religion is in some sense derived from or based upon religious experience is almost an axiom of current thinking, but few of those who have used the expression have indicated with any precision what they understand religious experience to be. There is ground for suspecting that the term conceals a wide variety of assumptions and theories which should be brought out into the open and subjected to critical examination. The following study is designed to make a contribution toward this end.

The nature of religious experience and its relations with experience in general and with religion is obviously a very large problem with many ramifications. I have chosen to deal primarily with normal conscious experience and its relevance to theological interpretation. What meaning can be attached to the claim that this type of experience is revelatory of objective meanings and realities and to the assertion that it is originative with respect to the ideas and practices of developed religion? It is because I have taken these problems as central that I have excluded from the field of this inquiry the anthropological literature which is

concerned with genetic problems, and the psychological and clinical literature dealing with the biographical causes and determinants of religious expression.

The three writers chosen for extended treatment were selected because of their representative character, influence, and originality, and because of their concern with problems of philosophical definition and analysis. William James is more responsible than any other individual for the popularity of the term religious experience and the meanings commonly attached to it. Rudolf Otto has worked out what is widely thought to be the most original and subtle theory of the nature of religious feeling. Henri Bergson has recently crowned a lifetime of creative philosophizing with a striking and important theory of the foundations in experience of religion and morality. All three of these thinkers—and in this they have gone beyond most others who have written on this subject—have worked out their conceptions of religious experience in the setting of a developed and distinctive philosophy.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Herbert W. Schneider of Columbia University for his patient and invaluable assistance in the preparation of this volume, and to the several members of the Department of Philosophy of Columbia University and of the Departments of Philosophy of Religion and Theology of Union Theological Seminary whose sug-

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Chapter I

EXPERIENTIAL RELIGION IN THE THOUGHT OF WILLIAM JAMES

THE history of the term "religious experience" and of the ideas connected with it has not yet been written. But Professor C. C. J. Webb has recently maintained that its modern currency and meaning are due very largely to the influence of William James's Gifford Lectures published in 1902 as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.¹ The term formerly suggested certain definite feelings and emotions which were deliberately cultivated in some Christian communities and regarded as evidence of the genuine working of divine grace. James set the example of using the phrase in a wider and more inclusive sense, and of studying the records of individual religious experiences in an objective and scientific manner. It is appropriate, therefore, that the present investigation into the theories and problems connected with the current emphasis upon religious experience should begin with a study of James's approach to the subject.

William James was both a psychologist and a philosopher, and this combination of interests must be

¹C. C. J. Webb, "The Nature of Religious Experience," *Hibbert Journal*, 32:17-30, (1933).

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reckoned with in any attempt to understand his writings. In the investigation of the meaning of religious experience in his thought, we shall inevitably have to concern ourselves with a number of his psychological and philosophical doctrines, but our approach will naturally be from the standpoint of this particular problem.

Upon reading *The Varieties of Religious Experience* one immediately becomes aware that James was ~~strongly~~ impressed with the futility of all attempts to state the essence of religion in a simple definition. He thought that the result was only an ineffectual dispute between one-sided theories, all of which fail to do justice to the complexity of the facts. Hence he repudiated all such theories in favor of an empirical approach to the subject of religion. But empiricism is a notoriously ambiguous attitude, and our first problem must therefore be to determine just what is involved in his application of it to religion. Sometimes it would seem that James meant simply a descriptive survey of religious manifestations, as when he alludes to "the purely existential point of view from which in the following lectures the phenomena of religious experience must be considered."² It soon becomes evident, however, that James was interested in something more than a strictly descriptive account. He wrote, "If the inquiry be psychological, not religious institutions, but rather religious feelings and re-

² William James, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

ligious impulses must be its subject . . .”³ In the second lecture he undertook a “Circumscription of the Topic,” which purports to be an arbitrary limitation of his field of inquiry. Primitive religion was explicitly ruled out of consideration, and in the actual development of his lectures practically all of his material was drawn from Christian sources. This neglect of religions other than Christianity might seem to involve a departure from the empirical standpoint, but we shall see that it is quite in harmony with the empirical approach as James conceived it. Far more significant is James’s easy acceptance of a current distinction of fundamental importance. He declared:

“At the outset we are struck by one great partition which divides the religious field. On the one side of it lies institutional, on the other personal religion . . . Now in these lectures I propose to ignore the institutional branch entirely, to say nothing of the ecclesiastical organization, to consider as little as possible the systematic theology and the ideas about the gods themselves, and to confine myself as far as I can to personal religion pure and simple.”⁴

If James had stopped at this point we should have no proof that he wished to prejudice institutional religion in comparison with personal religion; his restriction could be interpreted simply as a requirement of his psychological method. But he went on as follows:

“In one sense at least the personal religion will prove itself more fundamental than either theology or ecclesiasti-

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 29.

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cism. Churches when once established live at second-hand upon tradition; but the *founders* of every church owed their power originally to the fact of their direct personal communion with the divine. Not only the superhuman founders, the Christ, the Buddha, Mahomet, but all the originators of Christian sects have been in this case;—so personal religion would still seem the primordial thing, even to those who continue to esteem it incomplete.”⁵

We shall soon see what James himself thought about the completeness or incompleteness of personal religion.

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[The most important aspect of these quotations from James is the evident implication that he believed a certain relation to hold between the two forms of religion. The character of this relation is made clear by other references. “Original experiences” are contrasted with the “second-hand religious life” of the “ordinary religious believer.” The latter consists of “conventional observances” which have been “made for him by others, communicated to him by tradition, and retained by habit.” The “original experiences” are the “pattern-setters to all this mass of suggested feeling and imitated conduct.”⁶ And again, “Religious experience . . . spontaneously and inevitably engenders myths, superstitions, dogmas, creeds, and metaphysical theologies and criticisms of one set of these by the adherents of another.”⁷ It is clearly

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

evident that James's distinction between the two forms of religion and his theory of the relation between them, contains an assumption of far-reaching significance with both historical and psychological bearings. It is based on his view that religious experience has an *originative* character and function. We shall have a good deal to say later on about the psychology involved in this view. Here we may digress to note that James read the history of religion in such a way as to see his view exemplified; he even stated briefly a sort of generalized history of the development of religion, from the birth of a movement in a religious genius to its final solidification in a corrupt ecclesiasticism.⁸ He recognized the possibility, on the other hand, that a development in the opposite direction may take place within organized religion. The goal of this progress is "the idea of an immediate spiritual help, experienced by the individual in his forlornness and standing in no essential need of doctrinal apparatus and propitiatory machinery."⁹ The restoration of religious experience and the recognition of it as the essence of real religion represents the true ideal.

The meaning of all this is that James had a theory of the nature of religion which he brought to his empirical observations. Emile Boutroux expressed the true situation when he wrote: "It is not . . .

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 334-337.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

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simply because psychology is his special study, it is because he sees in personal religion the groundwork of religion, that William James sets himself to examine religious phenomena from the single standpoint of psychology.”¹⁰ His empiricism meant in this area of his thought and in his own words “the experiential point of view.” He believed that religion originates in, and always remains essentially something within the experience of individuals. Our object in this essay is to discover some of the meanings and implications of this conception of religious experience. Our view that this is the doctrine of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is corroborated by a letter written during the period when he was composing the Lectures, in which he declared that his purpose was

“*first*, to defend . . . ‘experience’ against ‘philosophy’ as being the real backbone of the world’s religious life—I mean prayer, guidance, and all that sort of thing immediately and privately felt, as against high and noble general views of our destiny and the world’s meaning; and *second*, to make the hearer or reader believe, what I myself invincibly do believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind’s most important function.”¹¹

For more than a generation this point of view, which William James expressed more attractively than anyone else, has been extremely influential. In

¹⁰ Emile Boutroux, *Science and Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*, p. 306.

¹¹ *The Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 127.

fact many recent writers, especially in liberal Protestant circles in America, have so much taken it for granted that there has been a tendency to forget that it is a particular theory of religion. We do not find anywhere in James's works an explicit defense of this point of view. From the letter already quoted we may surmise that he felt that the best defense of his theory was a direct expression of it, supported not by arguments but by personal records of experience. One's judgment upon the validity of James's identification of religion with religious experience will depend in part upon the account which he gives of religious experience itself. Certainly if the experiential point of view in religion is to be maintained, an adequate theory of religious experience is demanded. We shall turn, therefore, to a critical investigation of James's theory of religious experience; but first it is necessary to investigate the meaning of experience itself in James's philosophy.

The foundations of James's theory of experience are laid in his *Principles of Psychology*. Professor Dewey points out that two quite distinct theses are advanced in this work:

"The one is a re-interpretation of introspective psychology, in which James denies that sensations, images, and ideas are discrete and in which he replaces them by a continuous stream which he calls the 'stream of consciousness' . . . The other aspect of his *Principles of Psychology* is of a biological nature. It shows itself in its full force in the criterion which James established for discovering the exist-

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ence of mind. "The pursuance of future ends and the choice of means for their attainment are thus the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality in a phenomenon." ¹²

It is evident that these two tendencies lead in quite different directions. A number of the most perplexing ambiguities and inconsistencies which run through James's philosophy are due to the fact that he did not more sharply distinguish them. The former is a source of his radical empiricism and realism, the latter of his anti-intellectualism and pragmatism.

We turn first to James's reinterpretation of introspective empiricism. When James began his work in psychology the idea prevailed that states of consciousness are synthetic products built up by the association of discrete elements. This theory was an inheritance from the British empirical tradition, particularly from Hume who had said that all our perceptions are distinct existences and that the mind never perceives any real connection among them. It was difficult to see how knowledge could be accounted for on this view. Kant had argued that since our experience is not a jumble of disconnected and disordered impressions, it must contain an *a priori* and transcendental synthetic factor which imposes its categories upon experience. The later idealists developed this theory into the doctrine of an Absolute

¹² John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism." *Philosophy and Civilization*, p. 28. Cf. also Dewey's contribution to *Contemporary American Philosophy*, vol. II, p. 23-24. The quotation from James is from *Principles of Psychology*, vol. I, p. 8.

Mind which is the ground of the order of the world and of experience.

James appreciated the force of the idealistic argument, but his scientific temper and training would not allow him to accept it if another and more empirical solution could be found. This solution he found in his conception of consciousness as a stream or continuum:

"Consciousness . . . does not appear to itself chopped up in bits . . . It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.*"¹³

After laying down this basic principle James proceeded to give a masterly psychological description of the inner flow of the mental life. He called attention to many subtle examples of consciously felt transition and connectedness. The "substantive parts" of the stream of consciousness are surrounded by a "fringe" and connected by "transitive states," both of which are charged with feelings, whose function is to cognize relations. "If there be such things as feelings at all, then so surely as relations between objects exist *in rerum natura*, so surely, and more surely, do feelings exist to which these relations are known."¹⁴ In this way, as Professor Morris Cohen puts it, James "tried to save empiricism by making it more radical,

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 239.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 245.

by giving the connecting relations themselves a psychologic status on a par with the things they connect. Thus he thought to restore the fluidity and connectedness of our world without admitting the necessity for the idealist's transcendental glue to keep together the discrete elements of experience."¹⁵

It is apparent that this conception of experience has important implications, and we shall find that James was alive to them at many points of his religious theory as well as of his philosophy in general. It furnishes the psychological foundation for his doctrine of radical empiricism which will be discussed later. Another implication is his objection to mental elements in any form. He could not admit that permanently existing entities like Lockean ideas can enter into various combinations or appear repeatedly in consciousness. It is for this reason that he rejected the idea of a specific religious emotion regarded as the distinguishing mark or essence of religious experience.

2) The second or biological tendency in James's *Psychology* appears very plainly in the chapter on Conception. Here he developed the view that thinking is an activity operating on things, rather than a mere contemplation of things. "Each act of conception results from our attention singling out some one part of the mass of matter for thought which the

¹⁵ Morris Cohen, "Later Philosophy." In *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 1921, vol. III, p. 251.

world presents, and holding fast to it, without confusion.”¹⁶ A conception is a function, a way of handling a bit of sensible experience, and hence a teleological instrument. Furthermore, “this whole function of conceiving, of fixing, and holding fast to meanings, has no significance apart from the fact that the conceiver is a creature with partial purposes and private ends.”¹⁷ In the chapter on Reasoning, James developed these ideas still further, and pointed out that the only meaning of essence is teleological. “The essence of a thing is that one of its properties which is so *important for my interests* that in comparison with it I may neglect the rest.” “Reasoning is always for a subjective interest, to attain some particular conclusion, or to gratify some special curiosity.” “My thinking is first, last, and always, for the sake of my doing . . .”¹⁸

This account of the nature of thinking involves a theory of the significance of abstract ideas. At this point James departed widely from the older empiricism. In the final chapter of his *Psychology*, on “Necessary Truths and the Effects of Experience,” James maintained that the elementary mental categories, laws of science and of logic, and metaphysical, æsthetic, and ethical principles cannot be due to the cumulative effect of particular experiences. Rather they are “accidental variations” (like biological

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 461.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 482.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 335, 338, 333.

sports) which are maintained because of their *applicability* to concrete experiences. They are inward ideal schemes, derived from our organic mental structure, with which the order of nature proves more or less congruent. So far as they transcend experience they are "mere postulates of rationality." "They stand waiting in the mind, forming a beautiful ideal network; and the most we can say is that we *hope* to discover outer realities over which the network can be flung, so that ideal and real may coincide."¹⁹ Dewey sums up the significance of this theory as follows:

"It is therefore not the origin of a concept, it is its application which becomes the criterion of its value; and here we have the whole of pragmatism in embryo. A phrase of James' very well summarizes its import: 'the popular notion that "Science" is forced upon the mind *ab extra*, and that our interests have nothing to do with its constructions, is utterly absurd.'"²⁰

The biological basis for this view of the nature of thinking was set forth in James's interesting and comparatively early essay *Reflex Action and Theism* (1881). Here we find an analysis of mental functions based on the physiology of the nervous system and the doctrine of reflex action.

"The structural unit of the nervous system is in fact a triad, neither of whose elements has any independent exist-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 665.

²⁰ John Dewey, *op. cit.*, p. 29. The quotation from James is from *Principles of Psychology*, vol. II, p. 667.

ence. The sensory impression exists only for the sake of awakening the central process of reflection, and the central process of reflection exists only for the sake of calling forth the final act . . . The willing department of our nature, in short, dominates both the conceiving department and the feeling department; or, in plainer English, perception and thinking are only there for behavior's sake."²¹

Although James here and elsewhere employed the traditional tripartite terminology of thinking, feeling, and willing, it would result in grave misunderstanding to assume that he used them in the traditional sense. The traditional analysis is introspective while that of James is objective and biological.

The two tendencies which we have noted in James's psychology are reflected in his ambiguous use of the term "feeling." He rarely employed it in the strict sense of pleasant or unpleasant affections. When he was thinking in terms of the stream of consciousness, feeling is often used broadly as a collective term for mental states in general. But when the initial analysis had been applied to this stream and the distinction made between "transitive parts" and "substantive parts," James preferred feelings for the transitive parts and thoughts for the substantive parts, although he sometimes used the terms indiscriminately for the two kinds of states. When the other tendency was operative the distinction between feeling and thought tended to become sharper. The familiar tripartite analysis became controlling, and feeling is employed

²¹ *The Will to Believe*, pp. 113, 114.

as a synonym for immediate experience. In this usage it covered not only sensations and emotions but also the vague but extremely important "feelings of relation" and "feelings of tendency" which played such basic rôles in James's psychology. With them in mind James was very insistent on the cognitive function of feeling.

In terms of this analysis thought is an intermediate and instrumental function. It is reflective rather than intuitive, and teleological rather than contemplative. A thought or concept is something outside the stream of experience applied to it for the sake of some purpose. This is the source of the fateful distinction, made by James and many pragmatists and anti-intellectualists, between experience, conceived as something immediately had and undergone, and thought conceived as an instrumental function. Experience, which is supposed to be the most inclusive category, somehow excludes conceptual thought. The result is a bias toward nominalism and a tendency toward a skeptical relativism. James was not a consistent nominalist, however; he declared that "things seem once for all to have been created in kinds" and that "this is, in fact, a world in which general laws obtain, in which universal propositions *are* true, and in which reasoning is therefore possible."²² But this is not his predominant teaching, as we shall see at several points.

The foregoing account provides the foundation for

²² *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 217; *Psychology*, vol. II, p. 337.

James's insistence that there are two kinds of knowledge: "knowledge of acquaintance" and "knowledge-about."²³ Acquaintance-knowledge is the more fundamental. It is gained in immediate experience and cannot be communicated to anyone else.

"All the elementary natures of the world, its highest genera, the simple qualities of matter and mind, together with the kinds of relation that subsist between them, must either not be known at all, or known in this dumb way of acquaintance without *knowledge-about*."²⁴

Knowledge-about is derived from acquaintance-knowledge and is the product of the reflective activity of mind operating on the material supplied by immediate experience. "Through feelings we become acquainted with things, but only by our thoughts do we know about them. Feelings are the germ and starting point of cognition, thoughts the developed tree."²⁵

In the *Psychology* James taught that the distinction between the two kinds of knowledge is only a relative one, but later on he was inclined to make the distinction more nearly absolute and to emphasize the danger of confusing them. Even in the *Psychology* he clearly indicated the limitations of acquaintance-knowledge; it can tell us nothing about the inner nature of its objects or what makes them what they are. And his procedure at many points contains implicit

²³ *Psychology*, vol. I, p. 221.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 221.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 222.

warnings against building theories directly upon immediate experiences. They must be sifted, compared, and interpreted in very rigorous fashion before scientific knowledge can be based upon them. And yet we shall see that James himself fell into this confusion at critical points, claiming more from acquaintance-knowledge than it can possibly give.

On the other hand we find all through James's writings a polemic against the supposition that knowledge about, the abstract knowledge of science, is self-sufficient and constitutes a substitute for direct acquaintance. Abstract knowledge, he believes, has been over-valued all through the philosophical tradition. His attitude is an illustration of the nominalistic bias to which we have already referred. The following passage is typical of many:

"From every point of view, the overwhelming and portentous character ascribed to universal conceptions is surprising. Why, from Plato and Aristotle downwards, philosophers should have vied with each other in scorn of the knowledge of the particular, and in adoration of that of the general, is hard to understand, seeing that the more adorable knowledge ought to be that of the more adorable things, and that the *things* of worth are all concretes and singulars. The only value of universal characters is that they help us, by reasoning, to know new truths about individual things. . . . In sum, therefore, the traditional universal-worship can only be called a bit of perverse sentimentalism, a philosophic 'idol of the cave.' " ²⁶

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 479, 480.

This tendency in James became even stronger in his later writings. We have already noticed his attitude toward intellectual constructions in religion. A similar position is held in respect to the sciences generally. A conceptual system is only a map which "remains superficial through its abstractness, and false through the discreteness of its elements." Concepts yield wider information but they do not give a deeper quality of truth. "The deeper features of reality are found only in perceptual experience." "Only in such experience is reality intimately and concretely found."²⁷

James's pragmatism was the logical result of his view of the nature of thinking and of the two kinds of knowledge. If thinking is an activity its validity must be tested by its consequences. The truth of ideas is measured by their effectiveness in enabling us to deal with particular objects and specific situations.

"Ideas . . . become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience, to summarize them and get about among them by conceptual short-cuts instead of following the interminable succession of particular phenomena. Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally."²⁸

²⁷ *Some Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 78, 97, 96.

²⁸ *Pragmatism*, p. 58.

It is not necessary for us here to review the efforts which James made to remove the ambiguities from this statement and the theory which lies behind it. James's difficulties with the problem of truth were an inevitable result of the confusion of motives which underlay his pragmatism. One of those motives, the one which concerns us here, was to make theoretical knowledge subservient to the acquaintance-knowledge of immediate experience. As Professor R. B. Perry says, James tried to show that all knowledge-about is virtually direct or presentative.²⁹ The result was that James always tended to claim that his wider philosophical doctrines were true in a sense which goes beyond pragmatism, for they were, he believed, warranted by immediate experience. In such cases James was inclined to forget the limitations of acquaintance-knowledge which he had elsewhere laid down, and to claim that it gave a superior kind of insight into ultimate questions.³⁰ This "insistence on a non-intellectual variety of knowledge, which is more fundamental and more comprehensive than intellection; which affords as James expresses it, real 'insight' as distinguished from the superficiality and abstraction of intellection," Professor Perry says, is "the real support of the pragmatist polemic against intellectualism."³¹

²⁹ R. B. Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, pp. 356-359.

³⁰ Cf. *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 246.

³¹ R. B. Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

James's conceptions of the stream of consciousness and of the primacy of immediate experience coalesced in his doctrine of radical empiricism. In the preface of *The Meaning of Truth* James said that this doctrine consists of a postulate, a statement of fact, and a conclusion.

"The postulate is that the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience. (Things of an unexperienceable nature may exist *ad libitum*, but they form no part of the material for philosophic debate.)

"The statement of fact is that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves.

"The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure."³²

Here James has drawn a generalized conclusion from the psychological theories which we have already described. Yet this is only the beginning of his theory. The most important service of the doctrine is that it enabled him to complete the functional approach of his *Psychology* and overcome, as he thought, epistemological dualism.

In the *Psychology* James was an avowed, though

³² *Op. cit.*, p. xii.

not a consistent, dualist. He wrote: "The psychologist's attitude towards cognition . . . is a thorough-going dualism. It supposes two elements, mind knowing and thing known, and treats them as irreducible . . . They just stand face to face in a common world, and one simply knows, or is known unto, its counterpart. This singular relation is not to be expressed in any lower terms, or translated into any more intelligible name."³³ But James was disturbed by this "singular relation." As he explained in a footnote to his essay on "The Function of Cognition," appended when he republished the essay in 1909, he saw that it opens the way to Royce's dialectical argument for an Absolute Knower. Royce maintained, as James put it, that "the notion of *referring* involved that of an inclusive mind that shall own both the real q and the mental q, and use the latter expressly as a representative symbol of the former." "At that time," James declared, "I could not refute this transcendentalist opinion. Later, largely through the influence of Professor D. S. Miller, . . . I came to see that any definitely experienceable workings would serve as intermediaries quite as well as the absolute mind's intentions would."³⁴

It was like James to give the credit for a crucial point like this to one of his former students, but it is obvious that Miller had simply pointed out one of the

³³ *Op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 218.

³⁴ *Meaning of Truth*, p. 22, note. Cf. J. Royce, *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, chap. XI.

implications of James's psychological theory. James realized then, if not before, that if he could show that the relation between a thought and its object is a matter of "felt leadings" and experienced transitions, one of the greatest reasons for regarding thoughts and objects as forming two disparate realms would be removed. This he endeavored to do in that aspect of his pragmatism which A. K. Rogers calls "the transition-feeling theory of knowledge."³⁵ James himself indicated that one reason why he wanted to establish the pragmatist theory of truth was that he considered it a "step of first-rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail."³⁶

The chief feature of his radical empiricism therefore was a denial that consciousness is an entity or a realm distinct from its objects. He states:

"For twenty years past I have mistrusted 'consciousness' as an entity; for seven or eight years past I have suggested its non-existence to my students, and tried to give them its pragmatic equivalent in realities of experience. It seems to me that the hour is ripe for it to be openly and universally discarded."³⁷

Readers of his *Textbook of Psychology* are reminded that in this work, as early as 1892, he had raised the question of the existence of consciousness as an inner activity and had reported that he could not discover

³⁵ A. K. Rogers, *English and American Philosophy since 1800*, p. 377.

³⁶ *Meaning of Truth*, p. xii.

³⁷ *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 3.

it introspectively.³⁸ Indeed, in this book he definitely anticipated his later teaching that the same experienced fact in one context is regarded as something physical and in another as a feeling in the mind.³⁹

All this casts light upon the definition of experience which James contributed to Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*. There James defined experience as

"the entire process of phenomena, of present data considered in their raw immediacy, before reflective thought has analysed them into subjective and objective aspects or ingredients . . . If philosophy insists on keeping this term indeterminate, she can refer to her subject-matter without committing herself as to certain questions in dispute. But if experience be used with either an objective or a subjective shade of meaning, then question-begging occurs, and discussion grows impossible."⁴⁰

Thus the doctrine of radical empiricism represents James's attempt to overcome dualism. Thoughts and things are regarded as made of the same stuff, and as differing only in the type of relation which binds them together. And this stuff James called "pure experience."

When James went on to describe in detail what he meant by pure experience, however, he seems to have fallen into a serious inconsistency. It is not without significance that his essay on this subject

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 467.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 360.

should begin by expressing a preference for "more of the temperament of life in philosophy, even though it were at some cost of logical rigor and of formal purity."⁴¹ The basic difficulty is the question whether James meant the term to connote an essential and substantial character believed to pervade all realities. At one point, indeed, he explicitly denies that this is his meaning. He imagines a critic to demand: "If it [experience] be not partly made of 'consciousness,' of what then is it made?" And James goes on:

"To this challenge the reply is easy. Although for fluency's sake I myself spoke early in this article of a stuff of pure experience, I have now to say that there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced. If you ask what any one bit of pure experience is made of, the answer is always the same: 'It is made of *that*, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not.' . . . Experience is only a collective name for all those sensible natures, and save for time and space (and, if you like, for 'being') there appears no universal element of which all things are made."⁴²

This seems clear enough, and if James had stuck to this view we could say that "pure experience" in his philosophy is similar to Dewey's postulate that "things are what they are experienced as."⁴³

⁴¹ *Radical Empiricism*, p. 39.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 27.

⁴³ John Dewey, "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism," *Journal of Philosophy*, 2:393-399, (1905). Cf. the "denotative method," *Experience and Nature*, chap. I.

James did not adhere consistently to this view, however. In spite of his repudiation of "consciousness" and his efforts to use the term "experience" in a neutral sense, it seemed inevitably to carry a subjectivistic connotation which led him in the direction of panpsychism. The ambiguity appears in his "postulate" of radical empiricism, in the expression "things definable in terms drawn from experience." Does this mean that *my* world may contain only things which I can immediately experience, or does it, as the context suggests, mean that it may contain all objects which are experienceable by somebody? Evidently the latter, for as James says elsewhere in discussing the same point: "In this sense we can at every moment continue to believe in an existing *beyond*." What immediately follows is of great importance, for it is at this point that he opens the door to panpsychism, a speculation which always had considerable fascination for James.

"The beyond must, of course, always in our philosophy be itself of an experiential nature. If not a future experience of our own or a present one of our neighbor, it must be a thing in itself in Dr. Prince's and Professor Strong's sense of the term—that is, it must be an experience *for* itself whose relation to other things we translate into the action of molecules, ether-waves, or whatever else the physical symbols may be. This opens the chapter of the relations of radical empiricism to panpsychism, into which I cannot enter now."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 88.

When we turn to James's later writings to find the discussion which this reference seems to promise, we find only that panpsychism is assumed to be in harmony with radical empiricism and is defended as essentially true, though admittedly subject to speculative and superstitious abuse.⁴⁵ Indeed, in his lectures at Oxford James called radical empiricism a sub-species of pantheism,⁴⁶ and explained that by this he meant that it agrees with idealism in regarding reality as "substantially spiritual" and in identifying human substance with the divine substance, but differs from it in conceiving this reality pluralistically. He also explained how he had finally succeeded in removing the logical difficulty which had long stood in the way of his accepting panpsychism. This was his objection to the "compounding of consciousness." Much of the difficulty had been removed by his new theory of the relations of minds and their objects.⁴⁷ What remained was the purely logical difficulty of how a collective experience could be identical with a number of distributive experiences. He solved it, he says, by "giving up the logic."⁴⁸ That is to say, the "logic of identity" cannot give knowl-

⁴⁵ *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 309-316.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 35.

⁴⁷ See above, p. 20, and statements such as the following: "On the principles which I am defending, a 'mind' or 'personal consciousness' is the name for a series of experiences run together by certain definite transitions, and an objective reality is a series of similar experiences knit by different transitions." *Radical Empiricism*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 212.

edge of fact or rightly be used to convict experience of unreality and irrationality. "Reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will, exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it."⁴⁰ It seems strange indeed to see James making so much fuss here over the incommensurability of logic and the reality revealed in immediate experience, when he had expounded the same doctrine in his *Psychology*. It is simply the old distinction between immediate experience and conceptual thought. And in claiming that immediate experience shows that reality has a psychic character, James was simply falling into the error which we have previously noted of assuming that mere acquaintance gives knowledge-about.

James's theory of panpsychism furnishes the background which is required for understanding his theory of the subliminal self. It enabled him to believe that the self is continuous with a "more" or a "beyond" of the same quality. The self is surrounded by a "cosmic environment of other consciousness," partly personal in form but largely impersonal. He speaks of this spiritual environment as a "lot of diffuse soul-stuff," a "mother-sea of consciousness," or a "cosmic reservoir of consciousness." Communications may take place between the self and this spiritual beyond; and the "subconscious self," that is, the portion of the self which lies just beyond the threshold of consciousness may be the vehicle of such communications. The fol-

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

lowing passage, which James published less than a year before his death, is especially interesting:

"Out of my experience, such as it is (and it is limited enough) one fixed conclusion dogmatically emerges, and that is this, that we with our lives are like islands in the sea, or like trees in the forest. The maple and the pine may whisper to each other with their leaves, and Conanicut and Newport hear each other's fog-horns. But the trees also commingle their roots in the darkness underground, and the islands also hang together through the ocean's bottom. Just so there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir. Our 'normal' consciousness is circumscribed for adaptation to our external earthly environment, but the fence is weak in spots, and fitful influences from beyond leak in, showing the otherwise unverifiable common connection. Not only psychic research, but metaphysical philosophy and speculative biology are led in their own ways to look with favor on some such 'panpsychic' view of the universe as this."⁵⁰

It cannot be claimed that ideas like these are to be found only in one or two isolated places in James's writings, and that therefore they do not really belong to his philosophy. Professor Wendell T. Bush⁵¹ has shown, by citing many passages in which these ideas recur, that James was occupied with them during a long period of years. They are found in writings

⁵⁰ "Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher," *Memories and Studies*, p. 204.

⁵¹ Wendell T. Bush, "William James and Panpsychism," *Studies in the History of Ideas*, vol. II, pp. 313-326.

which precede and also in those which follow his major philosophical works on radical empiricism and pragmatism. Of course, it is open to anyone to show, if he cares to, that James did not really believe these things. James's critics differ greatly in the weight which they give to these utterances, as they do on every important question of the interpretation of his teachings. Our task here is simply that of sketching the background of the ideas which James employs in his theory of religious experience, and there is no doubt that there he made much use of these disputed theories.

In the foregoing account of James's conception of experience, we have seen that he thought of it as a continuous stream containing its own connections and transitions. He emphasized the cognitive importance and primacy of immediate experience and the controlling influence of active and volitional factors. We shall now follow James in his efforts to locate religious experience within experience at large, to define its essential characters, and to describe its typical forms. It will be apparent that he was not wholly successful or consistent in this endeavor.

He was compelled by his psychological doctrine that experience is a continuum rather than a synthesis of elements, to reject the notion of a specific religious sentiment. He observed that even among the advocates of this view there is no agreement as to what the religious sentiment is. "One man allies it to the

feeling of dependence; one makes it a derivative from fear; others connect it with the sexual life; others still identify it with the feeling of the infinite; and so on.”⁵² The diversity of these theories should make us suspect that nothing of the sort exists. The religious sentiment is simply a “collective name for the many sentiments which religious objects may arouse in alternation.”⁵³ But James’s fundamental objection was directed against the assumption that feelings exist as distinct mental elements. What actually exist as concrete states of mind are feelings plus specific sorts of objects. In this sense religious states of mind exist and can be distinguished from other experiences. We may observe that this approach sanctions a view of the uniqueness of religious experience like that of Rudolf Otto, which does not abstract religious feelings from their objects.⁵⁴

James held furthermore that there is no characteristic psychological process which serves as a sign of religious experience. This objection was directed against those who hold that the unification of the self or some similar process is the essence of the religious life. To be sure, this process underlies religious conversion, but it is by no means uniquely characteristic of religion. The psychiatrist may unify the self, but it would be absurd to say that his patient has necessarily undergone a religious experience. This argu-

⁵² *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 27.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵⁴ See below, Chapter II.

ment holds also against the commonly urged view that any supreme loyalty constitutes a religion. James was opposed to views of this sort which result in either an artificial restriction of religion or an extension of its denotation beyond what is actually found in experience to be religious. "I trust," he said, "that the present work will convince the reader that religion has plenty of material content which is characteristic, and which is more important by far than any general psychological form."⁵⁵

But if there is no distinct mental element nor any characteristic psychological process which is uniquely religious, how are we to distinguish religious experience from other sorts of experience? James evidently felt that there was no alternative here but to fall back upon what is generally so regarded and what appeals to one's own judgment as being religious. For himself the problem was that of distinguishing religious experiences from the philosophical and moralistic attitudes and states of consciousness with which he believed them to be closely associated. And he suggested that this might be done through a study of cases where the religious spirit is unmistakable and extreme.

"The essence of religious experiences, the things by which we finally must judge them, must be that element or quality in them which we can meet nowhere else. And such a quality will be of course most prominent and easy to notice

⁵⁵ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 349, note.

in those religious experiences which are most one-sided, exaggerated, and intense."⁵⁶

James has been criticized for his emphasis upon extreme cases; here we see one of his reasons for it.

"Religion, whatever it is, is a man's total reaction upon life, so why not say that any total reaction upon life is a religion?"⁵⁷ One's total reaction upon life does, of course, have a religious quality, but James objected that such a definition is too broad for convenience. We may be sure, however, that his attitude was determined by something more than this, because he went on to rule out Voltaire's "trifling, sneering attitude," Renan's ironical attitude, and the "heavy grumbling and complaint of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Carlyle." These are total reactions toward life, but religion means something more than these and different in quality. "There must be something solemn, serious, and tender about any attitude which we denominate religious."⁵⁸ Clearly James is appealing here to the common understanding of religion against any tendency to extend its meaning beyond what is recognized in experience to be religious. We may observe that any such common understanding of the characteristics of religious experience is relative to particular cultures and by no means provides a universal criterion.

James further maintained that states of conscious-

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

ness which are unmistakably religious manifest two related characteristics which are not present in merely moral attitudes. The religious attitude involves a quality or mood of "enthusiastic acceptance" which is absent in the other. The saint "runs out to embrace the divine decrees." In the proportion that a given bit of experience displays this quality, it goes beyond the merely moral and becomes religious. But this "enthusiastic temper of espousal" which distinguishes religion has its roots in a still deeper characteristic. The moralistic attitude is marked by effort of will, while the religious attitude is "the result of a higher kind of emotion." The religious man ultimately does not depend upon his own strength of will in meeting his duties but upon divine grace. "This abandonment of self-responsibility seems to be the fundamental act in specifically religious, as distinct from moral, practice."⁵⁹ It is thus a functional criterion upon which James really placed his emphasis, and he illustrated it with many examples drawn from the literature of morals and religion. To many people it will carry more weight than the former criterion, for one cannot maintain that morality cares only for the outward act and nothing for the motive which prompts it. Yet there is a tendency for morality as such to become calculating, and when it has done so James would rightly remind us that it has lost its religious quality.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

The effort to find that which is characteristically religious in experience has required at every step the acknowledgment of an objective factor in every experience which can be called religious. There is no religious feeling apart from religious objects. Religious attitudes are distinguished from philosophical and moralistic attitudes partly because of the character of their objects. To be sure there may be no one specific and essential religious object, but it is essential that there be some object of the experience. The object may be wholly within experience so far as the purely psychological requirements are concerned. Nevertheless, James apparently felt that religious experience characteristically points beyond itself to an object or to objects. "The religious phenomenon, studied as an inner fact . . . has shown itself to consist everywhere, and at all its stages, in the consciousness which individuals have of an intercourse between themselves and higher powers with which they feel themselves to be related."⁶⁰ If such higher powers do not really exist, or if there is no genuine mutual relationship between them and man, then religious experience is delusory. But knowledge of their exact nature is not necessary for religion. In James's view, religion is concerned with the nature of its object or objects only in so far as the validity of religious experience depends upon it. The interest of religion is not speculative but practical. It employs

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

intellectual conceptions only to the extent that they are necessary to clarify its experience and guide its practice.

James, therefore, designated the object of religious experience simply as "the Divine" and warned that "we must interpret the term 'divine' very broadly as denoting any object that is *godlike* whether it be a concrete deity or not."⁶¹ And the godlike quality must itself be defined in terms of the religious attitudes which it evokes. It is, according to James, because there must be "something solemn, serious, and tender about any attitude which we denominate religious" that "the divine shall mean for us only such a primal reality as the individual feels compelled to respond to solemnly, and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest."⁶²

We have now seen by what methods James developed his theory of religion. These methods are largely empirical, but they involve appeals to common understanding and personal judgment as to what religion is and what people feel, think, and do when they are religious. Despite his rejection of traditional theology, James showed a basically Protestant standpoint when he taught that religion has its abiding source, and therefore reveals its essential nature, in certain types of individual experience which have characteristic content. Without this background he

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

could hardly have developed his famous introspective and individualistic definition: "Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."⁶³

In our survey of James's general theory of experience we have noticed the fundamental importance and the unusual meaning which he gives to feeling. It has already become apparent that in his theory of religious experience feeling plays a fundamental rôle, and that one must bear in mind his general psychological theory if one is to understand this rôle correctly. James said that religion originates in feeling and that feeling is the most important ingredient in religious experience. In this usage feeling means immediate experience, and to say that religion originates in feeling is to say that it originates in immediate experiences. But we must not interpret expressions of this sort to mean that James held that religion originates in a pre-cognitive form of experience. For James believed that feeling or immediate experience is cognitive; it yields acquaintance-knowledge upon which all knowledge of actual entities is based. This general theory of knowledge and usage of terms is to be borne in mind when we read passages like the following:

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

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"I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophical and theological formulas are secondary products . . . I mean that in a world in which no religious feeling had ever existed, I doubt whether any philosophic theology could ever have been framed . . . These speculations must, it seems to me, be classed as over-beliefs, buildings-out performed by the intellect into directions of which feeling originally supplied the hint . . . Feeling is private and dumb, and unable to give an account of itself . . . [Therefore] we construe our feelings intellectually . . . Conceptions and constructions are thus a necessary part of our religion . . . Religious experience, in other words, spontaneously and inevitably engenders myths, superstitions, dogmas, creeds, and metaphysical theologies. . . . But all these intellectual operations, whether they be constructive or comparative and critical, presuppose immediate experiences as their subject-matter. They are interpretative and inductive operations, operations after the fact, consequent upon religious feeling, not coördinate with it, not independent of what it ascertains." ⁶⁴

In this passage James attempted to give a genetic account of the birth and development of religious ideas. They have their source in the immediate flow of conscious life. Here we become acquainted with religious realities, such realities as a "sense of higher control," of "inner-softening and self-surrender," of forgiveness and newly found peace, of new energy, of "perceiving truths not known before," and the like. The *Varieties* like the *Psychology* is filled with phrases which express James's sensitive awareness of

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 431-433.

these cognitive feelings which abound in immediate experience. These feelings are the germs from which ideas grow; they supply the hints which we develop intellectually. But on the level of immediacy these feelings are dumb and inarticulate. Because we are thinking social beings, we necessarily interpret them, construe them intellectually, conceptualize them. In this process the fluidity and intimacy of immediate feelings are lost, while definiteness and communicability are gained. Concepts are never quite adequate to the immediate experience out of which they arise, for they are rigid and discrete while experience is fluid and subtly interconnected.

Feeling is also the source of religious conduct in James's view. The tendency is for feeling to pass directly into conduct, for the stimulus to issue in the response, without the intervention of reflective thought. Thinking arises for the sake of clarifying the feeling-experience and guiding conduct. Just as the immediate stream of feeling contains the hints which are developed into religious ideas, so also it contains the impulses which prompt religious conduct. The religious attitude, as we have seen, is distinguished from the moralistic attitude by its surrender of self-responsibility and effort of will. When this surrender or relaxation takes place, active conduct of a sort not possible before follows immediately. This is because the effort of will is replaced by "an added dimension of emotion" which takes possession

of the will. James repeatedly emphasized the dynamic character of religious feelings. These feeling-impulses and the spontaneous actions to which they give rise are a very important part of religious experience. Indeed, to James feeling and conduct were more important than thought. "The theories which Religion generates, being thus variable, are secondary; and if you wish to grasp her essence, you must look to the feelings and the conduct as being the more constant elements."⁶⁵ Of course, it is the more personal and spontaneous kinds of religious actions which were important to James. "Prayer," he said, quoting Sabatier, "is religion in act; that is, prayer is real religion."⁶⁶ He meant, of course, prayer as "communion with the divine" rather than any formalized petition or ritual. Other examples are repentance and self-surrender. But when such acts become formalized and institutionalized they lose their experiential, and therefore their truly religious character.

The main office of feeling in religion is thus to raise conduct to a higher level; from the level of doing one's duty to the level of sainthood. The resulting outcome of religious feeling, James says, is "an excitement of the cheerful, expansive, 'dynamogenic' order which, like any tonic, freshens our vital powers." This, he says, is the "faith-state," and faith is among the forces by which men live.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 505.

One other aspect of the content of religious experience should not escape our attention. Feeling, as James employed the term, includes perception. We might expect, then, that religious experience or feeling would include certain types of perception. James, of course, did not believe that inferring the existence of God from observed natural facts is religious experience. On the other hand, certain disturbances of our ordinary sense-experience resulting from more or less pathological conditions, may give rise to religious experiences. This is because the world we perceive is a product both of sheer fact and of our emotional values. Hence if our emotional life is disturbed the world itself seems different. James described cases of melancholia, for example, in which the world seems remote, unreal, sinister, and uncanny. There is nothing necessarily religious in this sort of thing, of course, but since such experiences often give rise to questioning about the worth of human life and of the world itself—problems which demand a religious rather than a purely theoretical answer—they come to have important significance for religion. A striking example of an experience of this sort is given on page 160 of the *Varieties of Religious Experience* and credited to a French correspondent; we now know, however, that it is from James's own early life.⁶⁸ After describing it very vividly he indicated its re-

⁶⁸ *Letters of William James*, vol. I, p. 145. Cf. also Th. Flournoy, *William James*, p. 149, note.

ligious significance by saying: "The fear was so invasive and powerful that if I had not clung to scripture-texts like 'The eternal God is my refuge,' etc., 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden,' etc., 'I am the resurrection and the life,' etc., I think I should have grown really insane."

Both in his essay, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," and in the *Varieties*, James cited many examples of persons who have found deeper meanings in ordinary experiences than those which appear on the surface. There is a heightening of emotional tone, and new perceptions of the meaning of life and of the world seem to come directly from the experiences themselves.

Although James always claimed that he possessed no more than a "germ" of mysticism, one of his letters contains an account of an experience of his own similar to some of the milder cases of nature mysticism which he described in the *Varieties*. I quote part of it because of its connection with these lectures. It describes a night spent in the Adirondacks with a group of young persons.

"The night turned out one of the most memorable of all my memorable experiences . . . I was not aware of sleeping at all . . . The guide had got a magnificent provision of firewood, the sky swept itself clear of every trace of cloud or vapor, the wind entirely ceased, so that the fire-smoke rose straight up to heaven. The temperature was perfect either inside or outside the cabin, the moon rose and hung above the scene before midnight, leaving only a

few of the larger stars visible, and I got into a state of spiritual alertness of the most vital description. The influences of Nature, the wholesomeness of the people round me . . . the thought of you and the children . . . the problem of the Edinburgh lectures, all fermented within me till it became a regular Walpurgis Nacht. I spent a good deal of it in the woods, where the streaming moonlight lit up things in a magical checkered play, and it seemed as if the Gods of all the nature-mythologies were holding an indescribable meeting in my breast with the moral Gods of the inner life . . . The intense significance of some sort, of the whole scene, if one could only *tell* the significance; the intense inhuman remoteness of its inner life, and yet the intense *appeal* of it . . . so that memory and sensation all whirled inexplicably together; it was indeed worth coming for, and worth repeating year by year, if repetition could only procure what in its nature I suppose must be all unplanned for and unexpected . . . In point of fact, I can't find a single word for all that significance, and don't know what it was significant of, so there it remains, a mere boulder of *impression*. Doubtless in more ways than one, though, things in the Edinburgh lectures will be traceable to it."⁶⁹

James conceived of mysticism very broadly, including in the range of application of the term experiences as common as the sudden realization of deeper meaning in a maxim or formula. His four criteria of mystical states of consciousness, *viz.*, ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity,⁷⁰ would include many experiences that are not com-

⁶⁹ *Letters of William James*, vol. II, pp. 76, 77.

⁷⁰ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 380, 381. See below, chap. IV, p. 196.

monly regarded as mystical. Nevertheless he believed that mystical states of consciousness have "an entirely specific quality" or an "essential mark"—the "consciousness of illumination."⁷¹ The mystical mood can be stimulated in a variety of ways including intoxicants and anaesthetics. The effect may be described as an "enlargement of perception," and this led James to the conclusion that

"our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different . . . No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question,—for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness."⁷²

In spite of the impression of unity which such experiences almost invariably bring, James regarded their discontinuity with ordinary experience as an evidence of pluralism.

This explanation of mystical experience in terms of the widening of the area of immediate experience is used also in the *Varieties of Religious Experience* to account for the grasping of entities beyond the reach of the ordinary senses. James observed that religion causes many persons to regard the objects of their consciousness not as mere conceptions but as quasi-sensible realities. He maintained that there is

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 398, 408.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 388.

in human experience generally, and especially in religious experience, a mental process which from the purely psychological point of view has the same characteristics as sense-perception. "It is as if there were in the human consciousness a *sense of reality*, a *feeling of objective presence*, a *perception* of what we may call '*something there*,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed."⁷³ This analogy between mystical perception and sense-perception—having thus been established, James goes on to say that whether we take an object to be real, as distinct from merely ideal, depends on whether it arouses this sense of reality. This psychological theory becomes the basis for his view that mystical experience is impregnable to rational criticism. This statement of the nature of mystical experience in its simplest form must be brought into connection with what we have already shown as to the invariable presence of immediate cognitive factors in religious experience. These rudiments of thought are, in fact, of the nature of mystical perceptions. We can see, therefore, why James is able to write: "One may truly say, I think, that personal religious experience has its root and center in mystical states of consciousness."⁷⁴

When we turn from the analysis of the content

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

of religious experience to James's treatment of various types of religious experience, we are struck at once by his emphasis on diversity in place of the traditional concern with underlying uniformity. Religious experiences are as varied as the temperaments and needs of men. This emphasis on variety follows directly from his identification of religion with individual experience. If religious experience is to be classified, therefore, it must be according to psychological types of character. James hoped that his lectures might make a contribution to such a classification, but he made no claim to completeness, and he ought not to be reproached too severely for leaving out certain types of experience which critics have desired to see included.

We have already noted that James believed that in many of its manifestations religion can be distinguished only with difficulty from the moralistic attitude. This optimistic and relatively self-reliant type of religion James calls healthy-mindedness or the religion of the once-born. It is either an easy-going faith in the goodness of things or a voluntary concentration of attention upon the better side of life. The great contrasting type of religious experience is that of the sick soul, the individual who finds evil too deep-seated to be overcome by his own efforts, the divided self who must be born again to be happy. Just as the healthy-minded attitude shades off into mere moralism, the sick soul, in its more ex-

treme manifestations, exhibits pathological tendencies. Within each of these two main types a number of subdivisions are proposed. There is involuntary healthy-mindedness and a more voluntary and systematic variety. It is suggested that between the two large classes there is an intermediate type composed of those "who unite healthy-mindedness with readiness for regeneration by letting go."⁷⁵ The distinction between the types is a matter of amount and degree.

James has been subjected to severe criticism for placing so much emphasis upon extreme and even pathological examples of the religious spirit. It is obvious that his method tended to push a good deal of normal experience out of consideration and to exaggerate the pathological aberrations which extreme cases are likely to exhibit. James was quite aware of this criticism, and attempted to defend himself against the charge that he had thereby distorted the picture. In a letter to Professor E. D. Starbuck he wrote as follows:

"Of the strictures you make, the first one (undue emphasis on extreme case) is, I find, almost universally made; so it must in some sense be correct. Yet it would never do to study the passion of love on examples of ordinary liking or friendly affection, or that of homicidal pugnacity on examples of ordinary impatiences with our kind. So here it must be that the extreme examples let us more deeply into the secrets of the religious life, explain why the tamer

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

ones value their religion so much, tame though it be, because it is so continuous with a so much acuter ideal. But I have long been conscious that there is on this matter something which neither my critics have said, nor I can say, and which I must therefore commit to the future."⁷⁶

This defense of his position is largely the same as that which he made in the *Varieties* itself: "It always leads to a better understanding of a thing's significance to consider its exaggerations and perversions . . . To understand a thing rightly we need . . . to have acquaintance with the whole range of its variations."⁷⁷ If this assumption of continuity is true, then James was justified in his use of extreme cases for purposes of study, provided that generalizations based upon them are applied with caution to the milder or more normal varieties. The test of this procedure is necessarily the pragmatic one: did James succeed in throwing light upon the phenomena of the religious life by this method? The overwhelming judgment of his critics is that he has done so, though the light flickers a little at times and even seems a little lurid now and then.

A related criticism appeals to me as having more serious import: that is, the question whether his selection of cases is really typical of religion in its highest forms. Does he not weight the scales in certain directions? The reply can only be that of course he does; there is no way to avoid it. James would have

⁷⁶ *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 209.

⁷⁷ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 22. Cf. pp. 382, 486.

been the readiest of men to grant anyone his right to weight them differently, and to make a somewhat different selection of data on which to base his generalizations. James, like all men, was influenced by his social environment and by his own preferences. There is no way to get behind our judgments of what is most fitting and valuable unless we are ready to accept the dictates of authority—the last thing in the world which can be imagined of William James. To the basic question whether these ultimate value-judgments of ours are capable of rational proof, James gave a negative answer.

By his psychological analysis James sought to show that feeling and volition are more fundamental factors in experience than thought. Thinking depends upon immediate experience for its material and upon our active nature for its ends. But we must not suppose that this psychology caused James to overlook or to minimize the vital importance of beliefs. On the contrary, it is precisely because beliefs have a *vital* character that they are so important in James's view. They are generated in direct experience and are determined by the demands of our "passional nature." Our task must now be to examine James's theory of belief and to show some of its applications to religion. The discussion of religious belief will enable us to bring to a focus a number of philosophical problems which have merely been touched on up to this point.

We have seen that the different types of religious

experience are distinguished in part by the beliefs to which they lead. Each variety of religious experiences produces its characteristic attitude toward fundamental problems of theology and metaphysics. We can see the working out of this line of thought in James's treatment of the philosophical implications of the two main types of religious experience, those of the once-born and of the twice-born. The primary distinction of the two types is their different attitude toward evil and toward the place of volitional effort. The healthy-minded individual is optimistic; he regards evil as unreal or as something which can be overcome by actively striving against it. The former strategy is adopted by those disciples of mind-cure who dispose of evil simply by denying its reality and power. This extreme optimism takes a pantheistic view of human nature; man's higher nature is regarded as one with the Divine. The less extreme forms of healthy-mindedness place more emphasis on effort of will; they recognize that evil is real but deny that it is a necessary part of reality. Examples of this religious attitude are found in the less optimistic forms of mind-cure, in religious liberalism, and pre-eminently in the meliorism which James advocates in his *Pragmatism*. Because evil is recognized, this form of healthy-minded religion is not pantheistic but "casts its vote distinctly for the pluralistic view."

The twice-born man or sick soul differs from the foregoing type in that he regards evil as being much

more deeply rooted both in human life and in the world. For this reason he does not rely on effort of mind or will for salvation, but is convinced that he can be saved only by giving up all such reliance and seeking a supernatural deliverance. This type of religious experience fosters a radical pessimism concerning the natural world and the natural state of human life. But it leads also to a supernaturalistic outlook. "In the religion of the twice-born . . . the world is a double-storied mystery."⁷⁸ This supernaturalism makes possible a fundamental optimism; the sick soul having been born again, enjoys a profound and enduring happiness far beyond the capacity of the once-born.

In his *Pragmatism*⁷⁹ James seems to suggest that the experience of the sick soul points to monism. But this view is not so logical or so characteristic of James as the view set forth in the *Varieties of Religious Experience* which we have just described. To him monism meant the absolute idealism of his contemporaries, and in his mind one of its greatest defects was its unwillingness to recognize evil as evil. Hence the experience of the sick soul, with its vivid realization of the awfulness of evil, can not be regarded as pointing to monism. On the contrary, it points to supernaturalism or theism, and this is the view which James believed brings peace to the sick soul.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁷⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 291 ff.

James worked out the intellectual consequences of various types of religious experience. Religious beliefs are regarded as products of attitudes which are developed in the flow of immediate experience.

We shall better understand this theory of religious belief if we trace the development of his psychology of belief. The starting-point of James's theory of belief is found in his very early difficulty over the question of free will. This difficulty apparently arose out of a conflict between the mechanistic materialism, which his scientific studies seemed to require, and his convictions regarding moral responsibility. The problem was aggravated by his ill health and mental depression. While he was in this state he came across Renouvier's definition of free will: "The sustaining of a thought because I choose to when I might have other thoughts." He saw no reason, he writes in a notebook entry,⁸⁰ why this need be the definition of an illusion. "My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will." He determined to abstain from speculation for a time and to "accumulate grain on grain of willful choice." "Not in maxims, not in *Anschaungen*, but in accumulated *acts* of thought lies salvation. . . . I will go a step further with my will, not only act with it, but believe as well; believe in my individual reality and creative power." Here we find James exercising the will to believe long before he developed his doctrine with that name.

⁸⁰ *Letters of William James*, vol. I, p. 147.

The next important phase in the development of this theory is to be found in his essay entitled "The Sentiment of Rationality." The title describes the contents of the article quite adequately. How does the philosopher know when he has attained a rational conception of anything, James asked. "The only answer can be that he will recognize its rationality as he recognizes everything else, by certain subjective marks with which it affects him. When he gets the marks, he may know that he has got the rationality." The test of rationality therefore is a feeling—"the feeling of the sufficiency of the present moment."⁸¹ The interest in theoretic rationality is itself but one of many human interests. The basis of rationality is not itself rational, for existence at bottom is a sheer matter of given fact. If two conceptions equally well meet theoretical requirements the one which more adequately satisfies practical demands will prevail.

In the *Psychology* the problem of the nature of belief is discussed in the chapter which bears the interesting title, "The Perception of Reality." Here belief is expressly identified with a feeling, the "sense of reality." Whenever we accept anything as real or any proposition as true it is because of this sense of reality in our consciousness. Sense-perception depends for its convincingness on the sensational "tang" which it arouses. And other kinds of objects will

⁸¹ *Will to Believe*, pp. 63, 64.

likewise be accounted real if they arouse this sense of reality. Reality means relation to our emotional and active life; whatever stimulates our interests is real. Ideas which arouse this sense of reality are almost irresistibly believed. Religious convictions are held so steadfastly because of their feeling-quality and because they satisfy the demands of our whole nature.

This psychology of belief caused James to raise the question: what from the purely psychological standpoint would be the perfect object of belief? In the essay on "Reflex Action and Theism" James set out to answer this problem, but the most succinct statement appears in the *Psychology*. "The perfect object of belief would be a God or 'Soul of the World,' represented both optimistically and moralistically (if such a combination could be), and withal so definitely conceived as to show us why our phenomenal experiences should be sent to us by Him in just the very way in which they come."⁸² The mind has a natural disposition to adopt a religious view of the world. The religious hypothesis satisfies so many of the demands of our nature that it tends almost irresistibly to be believed.

But after all we do not need James to tell us that people tend to believe the things which appeal to their emotions and practical needs as well as to their intellectual faculties. Man is notoriously credulous.

⁸² *Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 317.

It is universally admitted that the tendency to believe needs to be disciplined and controlled if error and superstition are to be avoided. On occasion, however, the reaction against credulity has itself gone to very extreme lengths. James felt that such an extreme position was being urged by certain scientific philosophers of his day. They were arguing that it is always wrong to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. But James was convinced that such intellectual asceticism was calculated to destroy certain beliefs which may very likely be true and which are extremely important for human life. He was thinking especially of questions of religious belief, but his theory was intended to cover other kinds of belief as well. Therefore he undertook a "justification of faith, a defense of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced."⁸³ This justification of belief is touched upon in many places in his writings, but is most clearly expressed, of course, in his famous essay which he called "The Will to Believe" but which he said later should have been called "The Right to Believe."

The starting point of this doctrine is, of course, the psychology of belief which we have already noticed. This may be summed up in the simple statement that, as a matter of fact, "our non-intellectual nature does influence our convictions." This fact is implicitly ad-

⁸³ *Will to Believe*, p. 1.

mitted indeed by the very people against whom James was arguing. They maintained that one should exercise a definite will to *disbelieve* in order to avoid credulity. James argued that under certain circumstances one should exercise the will to believe in order to avoid certain definite disadvantages of suspended judgment. One should not allow one's fear of falling into error to paralyze the active search for truth. The problem, therefore, is that of defining the circumstances under which our passional nature may justifiably cast its vote in determining what we are to believe. James's answer is that it not only legitimately may, but inevitably must, decide when the option presented by different hypotheses is living, forced, and momentous, and when it cannot be decided on intellectual grounds.⁸⁴ For to suspend judgment in such cases is itself a passional decision. Whether to accept one hypothesis or another, whether to disbelieve or to believe, is then to be decided by the total weight of evidence which we possess, subjective as well as objective. There are cases where our attitude and the activity which it prompts may actually affect the outcome. In such cases it would result in irreparable loss if we should refuse to allow faith to determine our actions.

Now James believed that this is actually the situation which we face in philosophy and religion. Their task is to interpret the total character of the world.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 11.

But, James says, "the character of the world's results may in part depend upon our acts. Our acts may depend on our religion,—on our not resisting our faith-tendencies, or on our sustaining them in spite of 'evidence' being incomplete."⁸⁵

Twice in his later works James refers to what he called the "faith-ladder," a series of propositions which illustrate what may be called the logic of faith:

"A conception of the world arises in you somehow, no matter how. Is it true or not? you ask.

"It *might* be true, somewhere, you say, for it is not self-contradictory.

"It *may* be true, you continue, even here and now.

"It is *fit* to be true, it would be *well if it were true*, it *ought* to be true, you presently feel.

"It *must* be true, something persuasive in you whispers next; and then—as a final result—

"It shall be *held for true*, you decide; it *shall be* as if true, for *you*."⁸⁶

James always insisted that the objection of intellectualism to this defense of faith is itself an act of faith of the most arbitrary kind, for "it implies the will to insist on a universe of intellectualist constitution . . . Intellectualism thus contradicts itself. It is a sufficient objection to it, that if a 'pluralistically' organized, or 'co-operative' universe or the 'melioristic' universe . . . were really here, the veto of intellectualism on

⁸⁵ *Some Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 223, 224.

⁸⁶ *A Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 328, 329. The other version is in the Appendix to *Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 224.

the faith of the healthy-minded and the faith of the sick souls. We have seen that healthy-mindedness leads to an optimistic outlook; the more extreme type results in pantheism, while the more active type leads to pluralism and meliorism. The religious experience of the twice-born, on the other hand, leads to supernaturalism of a sort that usually, if not invariably, gives new energy and confidence to life. The basic criterion which James applied in judging the worth of these types of faith is their attitude toward evil. Because the more extreme variety of healthy-mindedness ignores unpleasant facts and omits to account for them in its philosophy, James regarded it as superficial and unworthy. But the experience of the sick soul and the theology to which it leads is worthy of respect because of its profound recognition of the reality of evil. Indeed, we get the impression from the *Varieties of Religious Experience* that James considered this type of human experience to be the only one which really takes account of the evil of the world.

"In our own attitude . . . of partial onlookers . . . it seems to me that we are bound to say that morbid-mindedness ranges over the wider scale of experience, and that its survey is the one that overlaps. The method of averting one's attention from evil, and living simply in the light of good is splendid as long as it will work. It will work with many persons; it will work far more generally than most of us are ready to suppose; and within the sphere of its successful operation there is nothing to be said against it as a religious solution. But it breaks down impotently as soon as

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⁸⁵ *Some Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 223, 224.

⁸⁶ *A Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 328, 329. The other version is in the Appendix to *Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 224.

letting our good-will ever have any vote would debar us from ever admitting that universe to be true.⁸⁷ Thus James's ultimate defense of his position is found in his basic voluntarism. It was his conviction that intellectualism itself rests on an act of faith. This represents the final outcome of the position set forth in "The Sentiment of Rationality." The ground of rationality is not itself rational.

But this justification of faith does not imply that we are free to believe anything that we choose. We cannot play fast and loose either with abstract relations or with the facts of sense-experience. But within these coercive limits there is freedom for the mind to select and construe in accordance with its active nature. James's theory depends upon a distinction between what we are justified in believing and truth. Some of James's critics have overlooked this distinction and have tried to make out that James taught that the true is anything which is expedient for someone to believe. But what James actually held is that the true is the expedient "in the long run and on the whole." The tests of truth are social and eventual rather than individual and immediate. James never succeeded in making his theory of truth quite clear or consistent, but there should be no doubt that he distinguished between hypotheses which can be accepted as science and those which may be held as over-beliefs.

⁸⁷ *Some Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 224-225.

The question whether James encourages people to go too far in exercising faith cannot be answered apart from one's own judgment as to the relative dangers of skepticism and credulity. James's attitude was determined by his own extraordinary openness to possible truth wherever it might be found. To James it did not matter where an idea may have come from; if it offers a clue to any human problem it should be given a hearing. The danger of James's attitude does not arise at this point, however, but at the point where he seems to suggest that the "right to believe" is a privilege to be exercised in certain cases as against continued and open-minded inquiry. There is no reason to believe that James exercised such a privilege himself; in fact he insisted always on keeping questions open for the sake of any new light that may come. But in the meanwhile, he insisted, men must act, and in order to act they need to believe. This must be granted, but the dangers of such belief must also be kept in mind. If James had given more attention to showing what objective controls can be employed in regulating the personal factors in belief, his teachings would not have proved so open to distortion and abuse.

Although we must admit that James does not give us an adequate rule for controlling the will to believe, it is evident that his procedure in judging the value of various types of religious belief implies certain criteria. This may be seen in his comparison between

the faith of the healthy-minded and the faith of the sick souls. We have seen that healthy-mindedness leads to an optimistic outlook; the more extreme type results in pantheism, while the more active type leads to pluralism and meliorism. The religious experience of the twice-born, on the other hand, leads to supernaturalism of a sort that usually, if not invariably, gives new energy and confidence to life. The basic criterion which James applied in judging the worth of these types of faith is their attitude toward evil. Because the more extreme variety of healthy-mindedness ignores unpleasant facts and omits to account for them in its philosophy, James regarded it as superficial and unworthy. But the experience of the sick soul and the theology to which it leads is worthy of respect because of its profound recognition of the reality of evil. Indeed, we get the impression from the *Varieties of Religious Experience* that James considered this type of human experience to be the only one which really takes account of the evil of the world.

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melancholy comes; and even though one be quite free from melancholy one's self, there is no doubt that healthy-mindedness is inadequate as a philosophical doctrine, because the evil facts which it refuses positively to account for are a genuine portion of reality; and they may after all be the best key to life's significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth."⁸⁸

But James could not get over the fact that the supernaturalism or theism to which the experience of the twice-born soul points is an attempt to rationalize the evil in the world. "Some evils," he says, "are ministerial to higher forms of good; but it may be that there are forms of evil so extreme as to enter into no good system whatsoever." This would mean that "no religious reconciliation with the absolute totality of things is possible."⁸⁹ This point of view influenced him more strongly in his later years. When he delivered the lectures on Pragmatism he was impressed, not by the sick soul's vivid realization of the evil of life but by his frantic grasping for security. He had formerly regarded the religious security attained by the twice-born as a genuine need of human life with its inevitable frailties, and even as providing a source of energy consequent upon self-surrender; now he looks upon it as a peril for the moral life. James is still ready to admit that most men need a bit of this sort of thing. Even the healthy-minded need an occasional "moral holiday," and there is something of

⁸⁸ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 163.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

the sick soul in all of us. Yet essentially he now regards the sick soul as one who is afraid of too much experience, afraid of life.

"And to men of this complexion, religious monism comes with its consoling words: 'All is needed and essential—even you with your sick soul and heart. All are one with God, and with God all is well. The everlasting arms are beneath, whether in the world of finite experience you seem to fail or to succeed.' There can be no doubt that when men are reduced to their last sick extremity absolutism is the only saving scheme. Pluralistic moralism simply makes their teeth chatter, it refrigerates the very heart within their breast. So we see concretely two types of religion in sharp contrast."⁹⁰

James here has drawn the distinction far more sharply and exclusively than he ever did in the *Varieties*. He believed that one must finally choose, and he chose the melioristic, pluralistic alternative. The ground for the choice is especially interesting.

"May not the notion of a world already saved *in toto* anyhow, be too saccharine to stand? May not religious optimism be too idyllic? . . . Doesn't the very 'seriousness' that we attribute to life mean that ineluctable woes and losses form a part of it, that there are genuine sacrifices somewhere, and that something permanently drastic and bitter always remains at the bottom of its cup?"⁹¹

The ground here given for preferring healthy-minded meliorism is practically the same as that given in the

⁹⁰ *Pragmatism*, p. 292.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

Varieties for preferring the religion of the sick soul, namely, its clearer acknowledgment of the reality of evil! James's foe was always the optimism which blurs the distinction of good and evil. This is his ground for preferring what he believes to be popular religious theism rather than the academic theism which identifies God with the Absolute. The pragmatist or meliorist can accept a God who is "but one helper, *primus inter pares*, in the midst of all the shapers of the great world's fate."⁹²

We shall pass over the question of the theoretical satisfactoriness of this final view of James, and call attention to the ground on which it was reached. It is obvious that the criterion which James applied all through this evaluation of types of religious faith is moral. He was not interested in a theoretical solution of the problem of evil, but in the type of faith which most adequately meets the challenge of the evil of the world. This is the meaning of pragmatism in religion; it insists on judging types of religious faith by their moral adequacy.

We have already touched upon the subject of mysticism at several points in this study. We have seen that James conceived mystical experience on the analogy of perception. That is, from the psychological standpoint, the process of mystical experience is similar to perception. The "sense of reality" is aroused, and as a result the object of the mystical experience is

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 298.

believed to be real. The question then arises: what authority can be allowed to mystical experiences; do they furnish any warrant for the truth of the ideas which they produce? To this question James gave a three-fold answer:

"(1) Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.

"(2) No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.

"(3) They break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith."⁹³

These three propositions stand together and form a coherent theory of mysticism. The theory depends on James's psychological doctrine that anything which arouses the sense of reality in us will tend to be believed unless this belief is inhibited by some other influence. There is no question that mystical experiences are usually absolutely convincing to those who have them. The question is whether they have the right to be authoritative to them or to anybody else. This depends on whether anything in human experience can overthrow them. Sense-perception cannot do so, James believes, for "mystical experiences are

⁹³ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 422, 423.

as direct perceptions of fact for those who have them as any sensations ever were for us." ⁹⁴ In other words, sense-perception and mystical perception are both forms of acquaintance-knowledge, and hence stand on the same initial footing. But mystical experience, like all acquaintance-knowledge, is ineffable or incommunicable; hence mystical experiences have no authority for those who do not have them.

But even if sense-experience cannot overthrow mystical experience, cannot rationalistic ideas overthrow mystical ideas? James gave a double reply to this contention. There is first his general contention that all ideas are derived and instrumental. Their task is to clarify immediate experience, not to discredit it. If our conceptual systems do not make room for all our immediate experiences, so much the worse for them; life overflows logic. But linked with this view is the further consideration that there may be alternative systems of conceptual interpretation for any immediate experience. Among such schemes of interpretation the rationalistic one can claim no pre-eminence. Indeed the existence of forms of experience of which it gives no account creates a presumption in favor of a more inclusive theory. The theories which mysticism favors then are legitimate "*hypotheses*, hypotheses which we may voluntarily ignore, but which as thinkers we cannot possibly upset." ⁹⁵

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

A considerable difficulty arises out of James's statement that mystical experiences are "direct perceptions of fact." This is another example, similar to those we have noticed before, of the laxity which results from James's belief that immediate experience or acquaintance is knowledge. The terms "fact" and "knowledge" should be restricted to interpreted experiences; where there is no interpretation there are no facts and there is no knowledge, not even of an ineffable variety. Hence, when James says of mystical experiences that "they are absolutely sensational in their epistemological quality . . . that is, they are face to face presentations of what seems immediately to exist,"⁹⁶ he opens the way to serious misunderstanding. He should have said "psychological" instead of "epistemological," for the important word in the quotation is the word *seems*. James does not really mean to assert that the "facts" of religious or mystical experience are facts of the same logical or epistemological order as the socially attested facts of science. What he does suggest is that out of the immense variety of immediate experience of religion some facts may possibly be extricated by appropriate methods yet to be developed.

James hoped that his writings might make some such contribution to this task of developing a critical "science of religions." We should note the methods which he proposes for this science:

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

(1) "Impartial classifications and comparisons" of the "myths, superstitions, dogmas, creeds, and metaphysical theologies" of the various religions and sects, in order to "eliminate the local and the accidental from these definitions."

(2) "Interpretative and inductive operations . . . consequent upon religious feeling."

(3) The removal of "historic incrustations" from dogma and worship.

(4) "Confronting the spontaneous religious constructions with the results of natural science" in order to "eliminate doctrines that are now known to be scientifically absurd or incongruous."

(5) "Sifting out in this way unworthy formulations, [philosophy] can leave a residuum of conceptions that at least are possible. With these she can deal as *hypotheses*, testing them in all the manners, whether negative or positive, by which hypotheses are ever tested. She can reduce their number as some are found more open to objection. She can perhaps become the champion of one which she picks out as being the most closely verified or verifiable. She can refine upon the definition of this hypothesis, distinguishing between what is innocent over-belief and symbolism in the expression of it, and what is to be literally taken."⁹⁷

It is quite evident that these suggestions are not sufficient or adequate to establish the science of religions for which James was looking. Nor did he claim that they were. The critical tone of these methodological suggestions is obvious, and should serve to allay somewhat the feeling that James was undertaking to justify credulity in religion. He said,

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 433, 455.

furthermore: "The conclusions of the science of religions are as likely to be adverse as they are to be favorable to the claim that the essence of religion is true."⁹⁸ James was ready to accept the possibility that the science of religions may not be able to accept any theology at all. In that case it would be confined to the history of religion and the psychology of religion, including the psychology of religious belief. James's own interests lay in this latter field, and most of his critics would agree that his contributions there are more valuable than his occasional forays into the more limited field of theology.

But we can be sure that James thought that the science of religions could verify at least a simple minimum of theological belief. To be sure, James was more interested in defending the right of individuals to hold the faith or the over-beliefs to which their own experience has led them than he was in discriminating carefully and critically the core of religious ideas which might claim a scientific standing. But the fact that he believed that this could be done is shown by his own use of the conception of the subconscious self. He believed that this conception, which he derived largely from F. W. H. Myers, provides the connecting link between the basic deliverances of religious experience and a scientific and philosophical outlook. It provides an explanation of the fundamental religious conviction that the self is

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

"continuous with a 'more' of the same quality." James then enunciates this conclusion: "Disregarding the over-beliefs, and confining ourselves to what is common and generic, we have in the *fact that the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come*, a positive content of religious experience which, it seems to me, is *literally and objectively true as far as it goes*."⁹⁹

But for an answer to the question of the nature of this "more" or "wider self" James believed that we have to fall back on over-beliefs. James averred that his own over-belief was in a God conceived not as the absolute world-ruler but as a larger power which is friendly to man and to his ideals. Thus his conclusion in the *Varieties of Religious Experience* is practically the same as that in his *Pragmatism*, the affirmation of a "piece-meal supernaturalism" with a finite and perhaps not wholly unified God, a God who helps man in the struggle against evil and with whom man is in some sense connected and in communication. It is clear that this view is meant to be interpreted harmoniously with the panpsychism which we have already noticed.

"The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also; and that although in the main their

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

or even of all that is progressive and highest in it. At this point James was misled by his own extreme individualism and by the assumptions which were predominant in his generation.

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⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher energies filter in."¹⁰⁰

The theory that the subliminal provides a channel of communication between the self and a supernatural realm should be rejected as unverifiable and improbable.¹⁰¹ It is more likely that ideas and impulses from below the threshold are products of the individual's past than that they reveal sources of objective insight. The constitution of the subconscious regions of the mind, the problem which James said deserved to be called "Myers' problem," is still a matter of hypothesis and controversy, but however useful such speculations may be for therapeutic practice, their value for theological construction is very questionable.

Though James was very cautious in laying down the criteria by which religious ideas may be accepted as knowledge, he was very bold and positive in his insistence on the possibilities of philosophical interpretation which religious experience provides. James always emphasized the necessity and importance of welcoming and testing all possible sources of truth. This is a constituent of the "pragmatic temper"—something which is even more fundamental in James

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 519.

¹⁰¹ Professor W. P. Montague accepts James's theory of the subconscious origin of mystical intuition but indicates the need of caution toward what he calls the "super-individual hypothesis," viewing it merely as a possibility. *Ways of Knowing*, pp. 54-68. For a more unfavorable view, see F. R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, Vol. I, pp. 119-120.

than the pragmatic methodology. It is a willingness to risk erroneous beliefs for the sake of gaining possible truths. And we need to remind ourselves again that any possible knowledge to which religion may lead is not religion itself. It is because James believed that religion deals with personal phenomena directly and that these are "realities in the completest sense of the term" that he can declare: "Religion, occupying herself with personal destinies and keeping thus in contact with the only absolute realities which we know, must necessarily play an eternal part in human history."¹⁰²

We have at length come to the place where we must attempt an evaluation of William James's experiential approach to religion. We have said that an estimate of its validity must depend in part upon the account which is given of the nature of religious experience itself. We must ask, then, whether James has succeeded in giving a satisfactory theory of the nature of religious experience.

In the first place it seems clear that this theory suffers from certain ambiguities and confusions which attend his use of the term "experience" generally. His fundamental difficulty seems to be that he overestimated the extent and the significance of immediate feeling in experience. Experience *par excellence* seems to be a stream of pure givenness which is later interpreted and conceptualized in the interests of

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 498, 503.

practical life. We have already noted the serious ambiguity which infects his use of the term "pure experience." At times it is simply a collective name for the qualities or natures which we apprehend. At other times, and more generally, it is conceived as a *materia prima* prior to thought and things and having everywhere an inner psychic character in addition to its empirical character. A great deal of the experience which James regarded as almost pure immediacy is without doubt permeated through and through with interpretation. James apparently wanted to minimize the importance of conceptual interpretation in experience because of his feeling that it somehow falsifies reality.

The difficulty here seems to lie in his conception of the stream of consciousness. This conception was developed in a dualistic framework, and in that setting was a valuable corrective for the atomism of the prevailing empiricism. But James seems to have fallen a victim to his own metaphor. When he came to give up dualism and to deny that consciousness is an entity or realm distinct from objects, he should have given up his conception of experience as being a flux of immediate impressions. For assuredly experience contains definite things and determinate relations between them. To this world of ours concepts are relevant and applicable, as the progress of science shows. We have no *a priori* warrant of their validity, as Kant taught, but neither have we some kind of immediate

knowledge which tells us that they are inadequate, as James seems at times to have believed.

James's low opinion of the value of conceptual knowledge is balanced by an exaggerated estimate of the value of direct acquaintance. He claims that acquaintance is a kind of knowledge prior to and in some sense more ultimate than the mediate knowledge which we get through concepts. Of course, we do not mean to deny the importance of acquaintance in knowledge; if there were no acquaintance there would be no knowledge of fact. But that does not mean that acquaintance is knowledge of fact. It is only a factor in such knowledge, and by itself it probably should not be called knowledge at all. Certainly it does not provide any insight into ultimate questions or any warrant for setting bounds to the validity of conceptual knowledge. James himself declared very plainly that acquaintance is a mere having of impressions, that it is dumb and can give no knowledge-about; yet he was very prone to step over these avowed limitations.

One result of these difficulties is the perplexing tone of subjectivism that runs through the *Varieties of Religious Experience*. James spoke at times as if the high degree of conviction that attaches to religious beliefs born in warm personal experiences were itself a warrant of their objective validity. I have already shown that this difficulty arises from the fact that he does not always make clear his adherence to the dis-

inction between what the religious man is justified in holding as faith and what can be accepted as objectively true. But this distinction was hard for James himself to follow because of his overestimate of the prevalence of immediacy in religious experience. His psychology, which postulates a "sense of reality," is surely at fault here. The feeling of immediacy is no guarantee that the experience is really immediate. We cannot deny that there are immediate factors or moments in religious experience or that they serve to suggest new and fertile ideas, but James does not help us in the way that we really need help to distinguish between immediacy and interpretation in religious experience.

These difficulties come to a focus in the perplexing circumstance that experience, which is meant to be the most inclusive category in James's philosophy, somehow excludes reflective thought. Thinking should surely be treated as a function in experience rather than as something which supervenes upon experience. To exclude thinking from religious experience is to weaken the forces of religious progress and to open the door to irrational extravagances.

The two tendencies which we have noted in James's psychology are carried over into two not wholly harmonious conceptions of religion in the *Varieties*. The introspective definition of religion, the overemphasis upon feeling and immediacy, the attempts to extract a common substance of theological

doctrine from mystical and other experiences, are due to the introspective and dualistic strain in the psychology; the functional analyses of religion, the interpretations of the influence upon life of various types of experience and belief, and, above all, the fundamental emphasis upon varieties of experience, are more congruent with its objective and functional aspects. Ernst Troeltsch regarded James's straight-forward empiricism and his assertion of basically varied types of religious experience as a radical challenge to the whole European and "Platonic" tradition, and credited James with having made "the first thorough-going contribution from America to the philosophy of religion."¹⁰⁸

A less favorable judgment must be passed on James's assumption that religious experience, in the sense of immediate feeling, is the essential and origina-
tive aspect of religion. This view is weak both his-
torically and psychologically. It cannot be maintained
that all of the rites, doctrines, and institutions of re-
ligion have originated in personal religious experience,
for these external aspects of religion antedate and con-
dition all the personal experience of which we have
any record. Religious experience, the religion of the
spirit, is an all-important aspect of religion, but it can-
not exist by itself, and it is not the source of religion

¹⁰⁸ E. Troeltsch, "Empiricism and Platonism in the Philosophy of Religion," *Harvard Theological Review*, 5:401-422, (1912).

or even of all that is progressive and highest in it. At this point James was misled by his own extreme individualism and by the assumptions which were predominant in his generation.

Chapter II

THE *A PRIORI* IN RUDOLF OTTO'S THEORY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

AMONG the theories of the nature of religious experience, perhaps the most distinctive and certainly one of the most influential is that of the late Dr. Rudolf Otto, for many years Professor of Theology in the University of Marburg. Professor Otto's immense learning and philosophical acumen combined with subtle psychological insight to make him one of the most original and significant religious thinkers of our time. He wrote widely in the fields of philosophy and theology, the history of religions, and the theory and practice of worship. Yet his thought was oriented toward the problem of the nature of religious experience, and much of his work consists in historical demonstrations and practical applications of his theory on this central issue.

Professor Otto's chief book is *Das Heilige*, which first appeared in 1917 and has passed through more than twenty editions and has been translated into many languages. The English translation by Professor John W. Harvey appeared in 1923 with the title, *The Idea of the Holy*. Earlier editions of *Das Heilige* contained a growing collection of supplementary

essays. After a time these appeared in a separate volume, *Aufsätze das Numinose betreffend*. These finally reached such a compass that they now form two separate volumes, *Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen* and *Sünde und Urschuld*. Most of these supplementary essays have been translated and appear in appendixes to *The Idea of the Holy* or in *Religious Essays*.

Otto believed religious experience to be a specific kind of experience, marked off from other kinds by its unique qualities. "If there be any single domain of human experience that presents us with something unmistakably specific and unique, peculiar to itself, assuredly it is that of the religious life."¹ His theory differed fundamentally from that of William James, who questioned whether religious experience contains anything of a psychologically specific character. Otto's theory stands much more closely to the tradition of Schleiermacher, whose definition of religion as the "feeling of absolute dependence" furnished Otto with his starting point. His work in large part was an effort to develop this theory and remove what he regarded as its dangerous weaknesses.

Otto must not be regarded, however, as a romanticist who finds religion to be simply a matter of feeling. He warned against what he regarded as a long-standing bias toward rationalism in religious thought, but he insisted that religion has roots in reason as well as in feeling. He criticized Schleiermacher on the

¹ *The Idea of the Holy*, 5th impression, p. 4.

grounds that his account of the nature of the feeling element in religion was not precise and adequate, and that he was confused as to the relation between feelings and convictions in religion. Otto's painstaking analysis of religious feeling is certainly the most original part of his work, and it will be considered in detail later. But in order to understand Otto's relations to his predecessors, we must see where he found the suggestions which helped him to overcome the second difficulty which he found in Schleiermacher. For help at this point he turned to Kant and to the little known Kantian thinker, Jacob Friedrich Fries (1773-1848).

Kant had taught that experience contains formal elements contributed by the mind itself in addition to the matter of experience which comes through the senses. These basic forms or categories are our ways of bringing the diverse data of experience into a unity of understanding. They are *a priori* for though they are found in experience they do not come from experience. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant presented a list of categories which he believed to be those employed in scientific reasoning, and in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he held that our knowledge of right and wrong depends upon another *a priori* form, the categorical imperative of duty. The *Critique of Judgement* supported the contention that *a priori* principles also have their place in æsthetic judgments.

It has been generally acknowledged that Kant's list of the categories is defective, and that the method by which he deduced them in the *Critique of Pure Reason* from the principles of traditional logic is quite inadequate. Various philosophers have attempted to work out a more satisfactory table of categories and to show more convincingly the source from which they are derived. During the early 1900's a number of German thinkers, of whom the most eminent was Ernst Troeltsch, were suggesting that there must be a specific religious *a priori*.² Kant, of course, had not recognized any such category, but had held that religion is based upon the *a priori* categories of ethics. Religion to him was not a distinct area of experience, but "the recognition of our duties as divine commands." He believed religious convictions to be postulates which are necessitated by the rationality of the moral law. The religious man believes in God, Freedom, and Immortality, because these beliefs are involved in his conviction that doing his duty is reasonable. To Troeltsch and others it seemed that Kant, in thus regarding religion as little more than an appendix to morality, was too much under the domination of eighteenth century rationalism. Religion is to be regarded as having its roots in a distinct kind of experi-

² E. Troeltsch, "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori," *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. II, pp. 754-768. Cf. John Baillie, *The Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 235-255. A. C. Knudson, "Religious Apriorism" in *Studies in Philosophy and Theology*, edited by E. C. Wilm, pp. 93-127.

ence, and this experience must have its own *a priori* categories. The problem that remained was to determine the precise nature of these *a priori* elements. This is the problem which Professor Otto tried to solve.

Mention has already been made of the fact that Otto found in Jacob Friedrich Fries suggestions for the development of Kant's theories in the direction in which he wanted to go. He actively promoted the revival of a Friesian school of philosophy, and set forth in his *Kantisch-Fries'sche Religionsphilosophie* his estimate of the significance of this movement of thought. (English translation *The Philosophy of Religion based on Kant and Fries*.) This work and his earlier *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht* (English translation *Naturalism and Religion*) are indispensable for an understanding of the philosophical background of Otto's thought. It is a serious mistake to treat *The Idea of the Holy* as if it were a complete account of Otto's theory of religion, for in it he emphasizes the non-rational aspects of experience in a way which is easily misunderstood unless seen against the background of his other works.

Professor Otto regarded Fries as having made two important improvements upon Kant's theories from the point of view of the philosophy of religion. The first is his treatment of the categories. Fries taught that the method of discovering the *a priori* forms of experience or categories must itself be empirical.

What is necessary is an analysis of experience to ascertain the *a priori* elements which it always contains. Kant himself had derived his list of the categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason* from formal logic, which he believed to provide a complete list of the forms of judgment. Yet he had himself implicitly recognized the inadequacy of this method when he showed that the mind employs other categories in the spheres of ethics and æsthetics. Fries's theory worked out the implications of Kant's actual procedure and provided Otto with what he considered to be a valid approach to the problem of the *a priori* elements in religious experience.

From Otto's viewpoint Fries further improved upon Kant's doctrines of the categories by providing a superior "deduction" or justification of their validity. There is a strain of subjectivism in Kant which is due to the fact that he did not clarify the exact status of the categories. Are they objectively valid, or is the phenomenal world which is grounded in these forms of thought a distortion of reality? Otto declared, "The question is first answered by Fries. He proves that all nature-concepts are merely the various forms of one fundamental idea of the reasoning mind—the idea of universal unity and necessity." "The Categories are 'pure *a priori* conceptions.' As such they are *real Knowledge*. In them we comprehend, quite independently of experience, from pure reason, purely of ourselves alone, what is the funda-

mental condition of all Being.”³ We shall observe, however, that Fries’s efforts to improve upon Kant in this respect open the way to a dangerous apriorism, from which Otto is by no means wholly free.

In the second place, Otto credited Fries with having shown the way to avoid the difficulties in Schleiermacher’s theory of religion while at the same time giving feeling its rightful place. In the first edition of his *Addresses on Religion* (1799) Schleiermacher defined religion as “intuition and feeling” (*Anschauung und Gefühl*) of the Universe or the Infinite. In subsequent editions, however, the term intuition is virtually eliminated, and in his *Christian Faith* (1821) the definition of religion is given as “the feeling of absolute dependence.” This change in terminology Otto regarded as a weakening of his theory; he contrasted the “wealth and exuberance” of the earlier treatment with the “very one-sided and inadequate description of religious feeling” of the later.⁴ He credited Fries with having given a “much more varied and precise development” of the basic position in his theory of *Ahnung* or *Abndung*. *Ahnung* is a kind of perceptual feeling whereby the richest experiences are brought under some form of the understanding which yet is recognized as totally inadequate to convey the richness of the experience itself. It is not a concep-

³R. Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion based on Kant and Fries*, pp. 49, 52.

⁴Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 150 ff. and *Religious Essays*, chap. VIII.

tion, but a "presentiment" of a wealth of reality obscurely revealed in the experience. Æsthetic experience is of this sort, for in æsthetic experience we have *Abnungen* of the objective values of beauty and sublimity. Æsthetic experience, moreover, leads directly to religious experience. "In our experience of the sublime and beautiful we dimly see the eternal and true world of Spirit and Freedom."⁵ Thus Fries comes to his basic formulation of the nature of religious experience: "the instinctive sensation of the Eternal in the Finite."⁶ Otto uses this theory of *Abnung* as the basis for his own conception of "divination," the faculty of "genuinely cognizing and recognizing the holy in its appearances."⁷

On the basis of this preliminary orientation of Otto in relation to his predecessors, we may now proceed to give an account of Otto's own constructive theory of the nature of religious experience. He held it to be a special sphere of experience, having its own distinctive characteristics and pattern. From the point of view of the philosophy with which Otto was working, this means that there is a category peculiar to religion, and Otto held that this category is the idea of the "Holy." It is commonly assumed that "holy" simply means "absolutely good," and that therefore the "holy" is by no means a category peculiar to

⁵ Otto, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 93.

⁶ Quoted by Otto, *Ibid.*, p. 32. Cf. Fries, *Wissen, Glauben und Abndung*, new edition, pp. 235 ff.

⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 148.

religion but only a form of the basic ethical concept. According to Otto this common assumption is totally wrong. The category of the "holy" is a complex category whose constituents are, on the one hand, moral and rational ideas and, on the other, an obscure structure of feelings or non-rational elements. The sense of "completely good" which "holy" has in developed religion is but part of its meaning; there is also an overplus of emotional connotation. The precise nature of this emotional overplus and its relation to the moral and rational meaning of the term is the subject of Otto's inquiry in *The Idea of the Holy*. This is shown by the subtitle of the work: "An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational."

Otto further contended that this non-rational factor or moment is more primordial than the moral and rational ideas which now predominate in the meaning of holy. "'Holy,' or at least the equivalent words in Latin and Greek, in Semitic and other ancient languages, denoted first and foremost only this overplus: if the ethical element was present at all, at any rate it was not original and never constituted the whole meaning of the word." These terms designated a "unique original feeling-response, which can be in itself ethically neutral."⁸ There is some ambiguity in this statement, and in Otto's thought generally, on the question whether these feelings ever constituted the

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 6.

whole of religion, or whether there may not have been from the beginning a tendency to express religious feeling in ethical terms. Critics of Otto have sometimes assumed the former interpretation and have condemned him on the ground that this implies that primitive religion had no connection with ethics and makes the connection of ethics with religion purely artificial. But this is by no means the only possible interpretation of Otto's words, and we shall see that he held that the connection between religion and ethics is intrinsic and necessary. What Otto wished to emphasize was that the feeling elements in religious experience are primary and that the thought-elements, including ethical ideas, are secondary, representing a "filling in" or "schematization" of the feeling-content. We shall examine later the problem of the relation between these non-rational and rational elements.

Otto's view of the place of feeling in religious experience is the reason for his unusual terminology. No one has been more successful than he in describing and analyzing certain of the subtle and manifold kinds of feeling which characterize the religious life. To designate these emotions he tried to use words which are rich in emotional coloring and which suggest the particular qualities of religious experience. He drew upon ancient as well as modern languages for this purpose, and when adequate terms were not available he invented them and filled them with appropriate

meaning. He was very sensitive to the emotional values and precise meanings of words, and his usages have enriched the vocabulary of religion. Furthermore, Otto insisted that the terms which are used to express religious experience must not be regarded as genuine intellectual concepts but only as "ideograms" or "illustrative substitutes for concepts." Otto agreed with both James and Bergson that concepts are inadequate to express the non-rational aspect of religious experience, for they necessarily abstract from the qualitative richness of concrete experience.

For the basic, non-rational element in the idea of the "holy" Otto has coined the term "numinous," derived from the Latin *numen*. "I shall speak then of a unique 'numinous' category of value, and of a definitely 'numinous' state of mind, which is always found wherever the category is applied. This mental state is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined . . . It can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened."⁹

We must not assume from the foregoing statement, indeed, that Otto regarded numinous feeling as an unanalyzable mental element, for he proceeded to analyze it into component factors or "moments." Before proceeding with this analysis, however, it must

⁹ *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.

be pointed out that Otto regarded numinous experience not as a kind of feeling merely, but also as exhibiting a category of immediate apprehension and valuation. Otto believed it possible to discriminate between the objective and subjective aspects of numinous experience, and claimed that the latter is but a "concomitant and effect" of the former. The numinous feeling has "immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self."¹⁰ We shall return to an examination of these epistemological claims, but we must first briefly review Otto's analysis of numinous experiences.

On the subjective side, it is "creature-feeling"—"the emotion of a creature submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."¹¹ This is Otto's substitute for Schleiermacher's "feeling of absolute dependence," which Otto criticizes, first, because it is distinguished from ordinary feelings only as a matter of degree and not of intrinsic quality, and second, because it regards religious feeling as primarily a form of self-consciousness, so that one can arrive at the object of religious experience only as the result of an inference. The second of these criticisms of Schleiermacher is based on the doubtful assumption that we can distinguish between objective and subjective aspects of an experience which is rich in feeling-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

content. As to the first criticism, we may question whether Otto has succeeded any better than Schleiermacher in showing that there is an absolute distinction between religious feeling and other feelings. Intrinsic qualities of sensation and feeling simply are what they are, distinct from all others; but they are not composed of discrete elements, and one feeling shades off into another by imperceptible gradations.

On the objective side numinous feeling is experience of a *mysterium* which is both *tremendum* and *fascinans*. Each of these words designates significant elements in the experience. Numinous feeling is experience of an object the ultimate nature of which remains profoundly mysterious. At the very center of religious experience is the mental reaction of stupor or dumb amazement which indicates that the religious object is "wholly other." "The truly 'mysterious' object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other,' whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb."¹² The mystics have most deeply realized the truth of the matter, and their paradoxical utterances echo their realization that concepts are utterly inadequate to express the wholly other essence of the divine.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

If the essence of the divine is profoundly mysterious, it is nevertheless a mystery which arouses "determinate affective states" in human experience, and about which, therefore, something can be said. The emotions inspired are dual or polar in character, so that the *mysterium* can be said to be at once awe-inspiring and fascinating.

The side of the experience which Otto designated by the adjective *tremendum* is itself complex, and Otto believed that he could distinguish three elements in it. The first of these is "awefulness." The awe which is inspired by the numinous must be sharply distinguished from mere natural fear on the one hand, and from moral reverence on the other. Otto asserted that it has not developed out of ordinary fear but from primitive forms peculiar to itself. "Its antecedent stage is 'daemonic dread' . . . with its queer perversion, a sort of abortive off-shoot, the 'dread of ghosts.' It first begins to stir in the feeling which, emerging in the mind of primeval man, forms the starting-point for the entire religious development in history."¹³ The same quality may be recognized in more refined form at higher levels of religious experience, and by no means disappears even at the highest level, as in religious awe. The second aspect of the *tremendum* is that of *majestas* or "overpoweringness." This is the objective element of which "creature-consciousness" is the subjective concomitant. Mysti-

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

cism develops these experiences of the self into the conceptions of the sole reality of the transcendent, and of the annihilation of the self. The third element in the character of the numinous object as *tremendum* is that of "energy" or "urgency." It is because of this element in religious experience that religion cannot be satisfied with a God who is a mere abstraction, but insists upon the reality of the *living* God.

The feelings thus far mentioned disclose but one aspect of the character of the numinous object, the side denoted by the adjective *tremendum*. Numinous experience has another phase in which the "wholly other" is revealed as profoundly attractive and fascinating. This more positive side of the numinous experience suggests the divine attributes of love, mercy, pity, and comfort. Otto held that hymns and doctrines of salvation and the imagery of eschatology are efforts to give expression to these moments of numinous feeling.

Otto's treatment of mysticism was based upon this conception of religious experience as involving the apprehension of supra-rational or numinous objects by means of unique feeling-experiences. He defined mysticism as "the stressing to a very high degree, indeed the overstressing of the non-rational or supra-rational elements in religion."¹⁴ On this view all religious experience has a mystical coloring, but some

¹⁴ *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 22. Cf. *Mysticism East and West*, p. 141.

forms have a stronger tendency toward mysticism than others. Union or identification of the self with the divine is a secondary characteristic of mysticism. Its essential basis is a strongly developed sense of the supra-rational and numinous character of the religious object. Hence mysticism can exist where there is no conception of God, for the experience can be directed to such numinous objects as the soul or Nirvana. The more important differences between the types of mysticism are due to the stressing of one or another aspect of the basic pattern of experience. Hence they may appear within a single culture. Otto's careful and suggestive comparisons of the types and elements of mysticism in East and West is important for the history and theory of mysticism, but does not affect his general theory of religious experience.

This summary will perhaps indicate the characteristics of the feeling aspects of religious experience as Professor Otto viewed it. It is evident that he enjoyed a rich and profound religious experience and that he possessed a masterly skill in psychological description and analysis. But it is equally clear that the center of his interest was not in religious psychology but in developing an interpretation of religious experience which would enable it to serve as a foundation for theological construction. Perhaps it is for this reason that he assumed without argument that all normal and developed religious experience conforms to the pattern which he described. He showed no interest

in James's suggestion that there are "varieties of religious experience." He did not, of course, claim that the numinous feelings which he described are actually experienced by everyone, but he maintained that lack of them is significant of lack of development of the religious faculty. Everyone is capable of having them, in the sense that everyone possesses, at one or another stage of development, a religious faculty or predisposition which is universal in mankind.¹⁵ The religious consciousness has its own innate structure and makes use of its own *a priori* categories.¹⁶ The heart of Professor Otto's theory of religious experience lies in these contentions, and to them we must now turn our attention.

The Idea of the Holy opens with a polemic against rationalism in religion. By rationalism, Otto meant the assumption that God can be completely and adequately known by means of concepts, and the tendency to neglect or overlook the unique elements of feeling in religious experience. He held that there are non-rational depths in the being of God which can be known only in some other way than through concepts. This way is provided by the religious feelings which have already been described. Numinous experience is taken to be immediate knowledge of the non-rational aspects of the divine.

In proof of this crucial contention, Otto asserted

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7. Cf. chaps. XIV, XVII.

in the first place that the experience purports to have immediate objective reference; its objectivity is a psychological datum. Numinous feeling "indubitably has immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self." "This," he continued, "is so manifestly borne out by experience that it must be about the first thing to force itself upon the notice of psychologists analysing the facts of religion."¹⁷ He quoted approvingly William James's statement, "It is as if there were in the human consciousness *a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception* of what we may call '*something there*,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed."¹⁸ Hence he concluded: "This 'feeling of reality,' the feeling of a numinous *object* objectively given, must be posited as a primary immediate datum of consciousness."¹⁹

There is a fatal confusion in this argument on account of the ambiguities in the concepts both of immediacy and objectivity. Otto writes as if a feeling of immediate presence were sufficient evidence of true presence, but this is by no means the case. As F. R. Tennant has pointed out,²⁰ a careful distinction must be made between merely felt or "psychic"

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁸ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 58.

¹⁹ Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 11, note.

²⁰ F. R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, Vol. I, p. 46.

immediacy and immediacy which is shown to be genuine by psychological analysis. And it is quite evident that there is no genuine immediacy in this case, for the numinous feeling is regarded as having "reference to an object outside the self." The presence of an interpretation or judgment here is obvious, and hence the "numinous object" cannot be said to be immediately present. Nor can the interpretation be said to have immediate certainty, for a feeling, however vivid, cannot guarantee the validity of an inference. There is no warrant for supposing a feeling to contain an immediate knowledge of its cause, and in any case, the supposition contradicts the alleged immediacy. The claim that numinous feeling signifies the presence of some particular kind of object, a numen, a God, or whatever, requires verification. A similar criticism must be made of Otto's claim that a feeling of objectivity in numinous experience guarantees the reality of a numinous object. For objectivity is of several sorts, and a mere feeling gives no basis for discriminating between them. The numinous object may be simply an object of thought or of imagination, but if believed to be real it may become the focus of feelings as rich and varied as those which Otto describes. Whether or not its reality is objective in the ontological sense must be determined by further inquiry.

There is little room for doubt that the subtle distinctions which Otto was able to make in the sphere

of numinous feeling are due to the presence in these emotional states of more or less undeveloped ideas as to their objects. Numinous awe is different from ordinary fear because of an obscure notion that the object feared is no ordinary object. Otto would doubtless have agreed that such ideas are present, for he was concerned to show that ideas develop out of, and in the midst of, such states of feeling. But he seems to have believed that in every case the idea is determined by some original qualitative difference in the feeling. But this is impossible to prove and very improbable, for it is a matter of common observation that emotions may be determined by ideas. This is by no means to deny that feelings sometimes suggest ideas; it is simply to question whether differences in the ideas that interpenetrate religious experience are to be accounted for in terms of differences in underlying feelings, and to suggest the possibility that at least some of the subtle varieties of religious emotion are to be accounted for by the presence of ideas.

Professor Otto's claim that numinous experience has direct cognitive validity does not escape the difficulties of all such claims of immediate knowledge. A feeling which is directly had, *erlebt*, is not cognitive in any proper sense. If a person reflects on the experience, he may say that he knows he is experiencing a feeling of awe or mystery, such as those described by Otto, for example. His experience becomes cognitive by becoming reflective, and its cognitive value is

strictly determined by the amount and kind of reflection to which it is subjected. When reflection interprets the experience in terms of objective significance there is always need for whatever kind of verification is appropriate and possible. Before verification has taken place the experience may be said to be cognitive in a provisional or hypothetical sense; after verification it may be said to be cognitive in the ordinary sense of probable knowledge.

The basic issue here, however, is no recondite problem in genetic psychology but a question of valid procedure in philosophy and theology. Otto evidently believed that if an idea has grown out of a feeling its validity may be tested by its fidelity to the feeling. He repeatedly attempted to decide theological or philosophical problems and to test doctrines by appealing to feelings which are believed to underlie and to determine them. For example, he held that numinous feeling casts a decisive vote for the primacy of will rather than reason in the divine nature.²¹ He maintained that in numinous experience the subject is conscious of his status as creature (*Geschöpflichkeit*) rather than of his having been created (*Geschaffenheit*).²² This is certainly a convenient method of theological criticism and construction, but its untrustworthiness is apparent, for it involves unjustified reliance upon the cognitive value of feeling.

²¹ Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Professor Otto did not base his claim for the cognitive value of religious experience solely upon the alleged testimony of immediate feelings. He laid more weight upon his doctrine that the complex structure of numinous experience is based upon an *a priori* category. As we have seen he was here employing a Kantian notion with modifications based in part upon the teachings of Fries. He went further in the adoption of a Kantian terminology when he spoke of the "holy" as a "schematized" category. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant derived the categories from the principles of logic, which, he assumed, reveal the ultimate forms of judgment. But in order to be applicable to actual spatial and temporal experience the categories must be combined with space and time, which Kant regarded as forms of intuition. This Kant called the "schematization of the categories." The categories which Kant actually employed, the "principles of the pure understanding," are the categories thus schematized. Otto's conception of schematization as applied to the idea of the "holy" involves a somewhat analogous situation. The problem is that of accounting for the fact that the basic ideas of religion have a complex meaning and seem to be derived from diverse roots. One of these roots lies in a distinct area of experience, the numinous feelings, while others are lodged in ethics and metaphysics. Otto's way of accounting for this situation was to maintain that the religious *a priori* is a complex or

schematized category. Just as Kant's principles of the pure understanding represent a combination of two factors, one derived from bare intuition and the other from the activity of the mind in judging, so Otto's category of the holy is a combination of factors derived respectively from feeling and from the mind's rational activity. "The 'holy' in the fullest sense of the word is a combined, complex category, the combining elements being its rational and non-rational components. But in *both*—and the assertion must be strictly maintained against all sensationalism and naturalism—it is a *purely a priori* category." ²³

Professor Otto was prepared to offer other examples of complex or schematized categories of this type. He declared: "The intimate interpenetration of the non-rational with the rational elements of the religious consciousness, like the interweaving of warp and woof in a fabric, may be elucidated by taking another familiar case, in which a universal human feeling, that of personal affection, is similarly interpenetrated by a likewise thoroughly non-rational and separate element, namely the sex instinct." ²⁴ But æsthetic experience furnishes the closest parallels, for it too has both rational and non-rational aspects and its categories are similarly complex. And like religion, it furnishes examples of both legitimate and illegitimate rationalization.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Otto employed this notion of schematization to indicate the nature of the connection between religion and ethics in experience. Here the connection is between feelings and ideas; yet it is not merely accidental or historical, a mere association, but a "necessary connection according to principles of true inward affinity and cohesion." The fact that category and schema belong together is "a necessity of our reason." "Now the relation of the rational to the non-rational elements in the idea of the holy or sacred is just such a one of 'schematization,' and the non-rational numinous fact, schematized by the rational concepts we have suggested above, yields us the complex category of 'holy' itself, richly charged and complete in its full meaning. And that the schematism is a genuine one, and not a mere combination of analogies, may be distinctly seen from the fact that it does not fall to pieces, and cannot be cut out as the development of the consciousness of religious truth proceeds onwards and upwards, but is only recognized with greater definiteness and certainty."²⁵

Here Otto guarded himself against an error which is frequently charged against him, that of assuming that there was a time when religion consisted simply in irrational and non-ethical feelings, and that the process of rationalization and moralization represents the introduction of alien factors into the religious consciousness. It must be admitted that Professor Otto

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

sometimes spoke as if the numinous feelings might exist in isolation from moral and rational ideas, and might even develop by themselves into higher and purer forms. But he also wrote, "Incomplete and defective as the process of moralizing the 'numina' may often have been throughout the wide regions of primitive religious life, everywhere there are traces of it to be found."²⁶ He believed that the history of religion shows two distinct processes of development: the refinement of the consciousness of the numinous as such, and the process of its rationalization and moralization. Sometimes Otto seems to have thought of these processes as independent of each other, but more often he recognized that they are intimately and necessarily connected, each conditioning the other as an indispensable condition of advance.

The relationship of religion and ethics is further shown by the fact that moral and metaphysical ideas serve as symbols or "ideograms" for numinous feelings. The dangers of moralism and rationalism in religion arise when it is assumed that they are perfectly adequate symbols, or when it is forgotten that they are symbols and derive their meaning from their background of feeling. But, as we have seen, Professor Otto further insisted that these "ideograms," imperfect symbols that they are, possess a cognitive status and objective reference which is conferred upon them by the underlying category of the holy.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

We must now inquire into the justification of this claim.

By what right are the numinous feelings "schematized" by ethical or other rational ideas, so that these ideas may serve as symbols, not only of the experiences themselves, but of objective realities? It is apparent that the crucial problem lies in Otto's conception of the nature of the connection between these feelings and ideas; or, to use his own terminology, between the non-rational and the rational aspects of the complex category of the holy. The relation is obviously not one of implication; nevertheless the process of interpreting the numinous feelings in terms of ethical and rational ideas is "*felt* as something axiomatic, something whose inner necessity we feel to be self-evident."²⁷ It is very significant that Otto went on to say, "But then this inward self-evidence is a problem in itself; we are forced to assume an obscure, *a priori* knowledge of the necessity of this synthesis, combining rational and non-rational." It is apparent that here again he fell back upon "feeling," here interpreted as *a priori* knowledge, and the criterion of self-evidence or immediate insight.

We must, therefore, investigate what Otto meant by the *a priori* and his proofs of the *a priori* character of the idea of the holy in each of its aspects. In the case of the rational and ethical ideas which constitute the "schema" of the category, Otto meant that they

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

are not derived from sense-perception, but from "an original and underivable capacity of the mind implanted in the 'pure reason' independently of all perception."²⁸ Otto believed that the numinous feelings come from a similar but deeper source:

"But in the case of the non-rational elements of our category of the Holy we are referred back to something still deeper than the 'pure reason,' at least as this is usually understood, namely to that which Mysticism has rightly named the 'fundus animae,' the 'bottom' or 'ground of the soul' (Seelengrund) . . . [The numinous] issues from the deepest foundation of cognitive apprehension that the soul possesses, and, though it of course comes into being in and amid the sensory data and empirical material of the natural world and cannot anticipate or dispense with those, yet it does not arise *out of* them, but only *by their means* . . . The proof that in the numinous we have to deal with purely *a priori* cognitive elements is to be reached by introspection and a critical examination of reason such as Kant instituted. We find, that is, involved in the numinous experience, beliefs and feelings qualitatively different from anything that 'natural' sense-perception is capable of giving us. They are themselves not perceptions at all, but peculiar interpretations and valuations, at first of perceptual data, and then—at a higher level—of posited objects and entities, which themselves no longer belong to the perceptual world, but are thought of as supplementing and transcending it. . . . The facts of the numinous consciousness point therefore—as likewise do also the 'pure concepts of the understanding' of Kant and the ideas and value-judgments of ethics or æsthetics—to a hidden substantive source, from

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

which the religious ideas and feelings are formed, which lies in the mind independently of sense-experience; a 'pure reason' in the profoundest sense, which, because of the surpassingness of its content, must be distinguished from both the pure theoretical and the pure practical reason of Kant, as something yet higher or deeper than they."²⁰

The essence of this argument is the contention that numinous experience contains interpretations and valuations which cannot be derived from ordinary sense-experience, and which must therefore come from a substantive source in the mind itself. The numinous feelings and valuations, being specific and unique, are only to be derived from "predispositions," "potentialities," or "capacities" of the human mind. This is a very curious argument, and one which leaves the real problem untouched. Otto's complete repudiation of the idea of the evolution or transmutation of experienced qualities means that all distinguishable qualities which ever have been or ever will be experienced by anyone must be regarded as the mere coming to light of potentialities of the human mind. There is, then, no means of escape from this wholesale subjectivity except by the equally wholesale assumption that these qualities are immediately cognitive. But as we have already pointed out, qualities or feelings are not cognitive save as they are interpreted, and their valid interpretation is not immediately self-evident but requires verification.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-118.

Professor Otto's reference of both the qualitative and structural aspects of religious experience to *a priori* sources is surely an example of exaggerated apriorism. We may rightly ask; what then is *a posteriori* in religious experience, in fact, in experience of any sort. The reply might be that these qualities must await their appropriate stimuli to call them forth. But it is obvious that there is a wide difference between response to a stimulus and knowledge of it and of its relations with other entities. A feeling-response must never be supposed to yield an immediate knowledge of its cause. We need guidance in our interpretation of experience, and this can only come from its structural elements. The more important part of Otto's apriorism, therefore, is his contention that the structural aspect of religious experience is not to be explained in terms of experience itself, but is derived from the structure of the mind.

In the first place it may be remarked that even if this contention should be granted, Otto has not thereby justified his claim that religious experience is directly cognitive. For if the structure of our experience is subjective, we have still to seek for the warrant for the claim that experience brings us into contact with objective reality. Sometimes Otto attempts to get over this difficulty simply by appealing for the recognition of cognitive faculties within the human spirit.³⁰ The potentialities and capacities of the human

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11, note; pp. 116-119.

mind are grounded, in turn, upon absolute mind as pure actuality. This position is barely suggested in *The Idea of the Holy*, but is developed at length in Otto's earlier book *Naturalism and Religion*. His purpose in this work was to define the "antithesis" between the naturalistic and the religious interpretations of the world and "to vindicate against the counter-claims of naturalism the validity and freedom of the religious outlook."³¹ The naturalism with which Otto was concerned was that which postulates mechanism in the whole of nature, treats the mental sciences as a part of natural science, and attempts to reduce all principles of explanation to the laws of physics and chemistry. Against this type of naturalism Otto contended that religion must have scope to interpret the world in terms of purpose and to justify the sense of mystery and the consciousness of absolute dependence.

The religious world-view is not to be derived from science, for religion has other sources of insight. Religious conceptions "weave themselves together out of the most inward and subtle experiences, out of impressions which are coarsened in the very act of expressing them. Their import and value must be judged entirely by the standards of conscience and feeling, by their own self-sufficiency and validity."³² It is not to be expected that the religious outlook can

³¹ R. Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, p. 1.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

ever be brought into absolute congruence with the scientific, for each is a partial view based on particular human interests. The fundamental issue is that of "the reality, pre-eminence, and independence of the spiritual as opposed to the 'natural'." ³³ "The religious conception is deeply antagonistic to all such attempts to range spirit, spiritual being, and the subjective world under 'nature,' 'matter,' 'energy,' or whatever we may call that which is opposed to mind and ranked above it in reality and value. The religious conception is made up essentially of a belief in spirit, its worth and pre-eminence." ³⁴

In this book Professor Otto resolved the conflict along the lines of the subjectivistic Kantianism which we have already surveyed. The world which science comprehends is appearance and not reality, for it depends upon our forms of intuition and understanding—space and time and the categories. This is itself proof of the pre-eminence of spirit, for it is spirit which contributes these forms. But the basic argument for his conclusion was derived from feeling and intuition construed as immediately cognitive. "We possess in direct experience the best guarantee of truth. For we experience nothing more certainly than the content and riches of our own mind, its power of acting and creating, and all its great capacities." ³⁵

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

As we have seen, this type of argument was still employed in *The Idea of the Holy*. But in this work Otto held with Fries that the categories are metaphysically valid, and laid his chief emphasis upon the contention that religious experience is directly cognitive because it possesses its own *a priori* category.

It would seem perfectly obvious that all of these varied appeals to the *a priori* contain one form or another of the basic assumption of rationalism, that there is a pre-established harmony or congruence of structure between the mind and reality. In spite of Otto's extensive use of Kantian terminology, he really abandoned the basic position of the critical philosophy. And in spite of his emphasis upon feeling and the non-rational, his interpretation of religious experience depends at every crucial point upon the historic assumptions of rationalism.

Whereas Otto speaks of the schematization of numinous feelings by moral and rational ideas, it would be at least equally appropriate to refer to his treatment of the category of the holy as a "numinization" of rational schemes. That is to say, from the point of view of Otto's philosophy as a whole, the structural elements in the category, being regarded as *a priori*, are more basic than the numinous feelings with which they are associated.³⁶ And this is doubtless correct,

³⁶ Even Otto says, "These feelings can only arise in the mind as accompanying emotions when the category of the 'numinous' is called into play." Cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 11.

for we can hardly accept the traces of romanticism in Otto's psychology which caused him to regard the numinous feelings as primordial and ideas as derived from them.

But neither can we accept Otto's rationalistic treatment of the cognitive functions. The difficulties both in the Kantian position and in that of Otto can be greatly simplified by a different approach to what these philosophies call the *a priori* categories. Otto was right, of course, in maintaining that experience contains structural elements, and that these forms are not derived from experience in the sense of being pieced together out of sensations; but they are derived from functions performed in experience. Kant rightly regarded the categories as modes of mental activity, but he and his followers went on to make the unnecessary and misleading assumption that they were imposed upon experience by a transcendent self. Their origin lies rather in tentative activities whereby the intelligent organism seeks to control and comprehend its experience. They begin as accidental or experimental variations, and experience sifts out those which perform a satisfactory function. The formal structures of experience are hypothetical and instrumental. William James compares them to a net which is thrown over experience in the hope that it will yield a catch.³⁷ These forms and systems gain empirical

³⁷ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. II, chap. XVIII. Cf. pp. 638, 665.

meaning as they are found to be applicable to experience. The categories are simply those forms of thought whose applicability to experience has been so often demonstrated that they have become habitual and unquestioned.

If this conception of the *a priori* is made the basis of a reinterpretation of Otto's analysis of religious experience the way is opened for both an enrichment and a simplification of his theory. The richness and subtlety of his description of religious feelings may be fully recognized. But there is no need for attributing to the numinous feelings so much fixity of structure as he has done. The numinous feelings which Otto describes represent a selection from more extensive varieties. And, on the other hand, one is spared the difficulties of attempting to defend the view that religious experience is immediately cognitive. It should rather be thought of as having a preliminary and a consummatory function with respect to knowledge. It is pre-cognitive in that it provides a fertile field for the production of interpretations and hypotheses; it is post-cognitive in that it clothes ideas and ideals with a rich texture of feeling.

Since we are ready to grant Professor Otto's contention of the reality and uniqueness of the numinous feelings and valuations, we must also grant that the problem of the relation between religion and ethics must be faced in his spirit. This involves the rejection of theories which regard religion as being grounded

simply upon the moral consciousness by way of postulates, after the manner of Kant. Professor Otto has convincingly shown that such a rendering of the matter does not do justice to the complexity of religious experience. Professor Baillie, who holds a theory of this sort, reproaches Otto for introducing unnecessary complications into the problem of the relation of religion and ethics, but it would seem that the problem is complicated by the very nature of religious experience, and not by any artificiality in Otto's theory.³⁸

Religious experience is a complex synthesis of numinous feelings and moral and rational ideas. Professor Otto is surely right in maintaining that this synthesis is not simply an accidental one, but one which rests upon an intrinsic connection. This is the essence of his claim that the religious category is a "schematized" category and that the connection between its component parts is *a priori*. Although ethical valuations cannot be deduced from numinous valuations, or vice versa, the mind perceives a real connection between them in experience. There has evidently been, from the beginning of human culture, a tendency to endow the numinous object with ethical attributes. Religious experience has thus given rise to ethical insight and rational speculation, and these mental activities have in turn reacted upon religion and religious experience, purifying them and

³⁸ Cf. John Baillie, *The Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 246-255.

providing them with concepts which are indispensable for their advancement.

In justice to Professor Otto we must recognize that his insistence upon the presence of *a priori* elements in religious experience was not meant to open the door to speculative theology and metaphysics. These elements were designed to justify the claim that religious experience has a cognitive function and value, for they provide the formal structures which endow it with objective reference. But the ideas which arise in and through religious experience are inevitably less precise and clear cut than the concepts which emerge out of other areas of experience, inasmuch as their feeling content is richer. As a matter of fact Otto has been more often criticized for leaning too far in the direction of irrationalism than for his rationalism and apriorism. Dr. Leonard Hodgson, for example, accuses him of holding that religious beliefs are beyond the reach of rational criticism or defense, and that religious experience has to do with an aspect of reality which has no rational connection with the rest of the universe.³⁹ The former charge is supported by the citation of passages in which Otto went so far as to speak of religious intuitions as "immune from rational criticism."⁴⁰ But the context of such passages clearly shows that Otto meant simply that they are un-

³⁹ Leonard Hodgson, *The Place of Reason in Christian Apologetic*, Lecture I.

⁴⁰ *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 178.

touched by a criticism which takes no account of the religious consciousness itself. Otto did not mean that the religious consciousness is devoid of rational interconnection with the rest of experience. It has its own immanent though incomplete rationality, and its distinctness from other areas of experience is relative, not absolute.

Thinking always operates in a context of experience which is but imperfectly comprehended by the rational, conceptual patterns by which we seek to understand it. Otto was surely right in maintaining that in the sphere of religious experience the matter of experience overflows its formal structures even more abundantly than elsewhere. From this it would seem to follow that religious experience is experience of an aspect of reality which is deeper and more mysterious than those aspects of reality revealed by more everyday forms of experience. But this is far from saying that Otto believed that the Divine has no rational connection with the whole of reality. We have seen that Otto not only refers to the rational and non-rational aspects of reality as being interwoven like the warp and woof of a fabric, but he holds that their relation is reflected in an intrinsic and necessary connection between numinous feelings and moral and rational ideas. When Otto's theory of religious experience as expressed in *The Idea of the Holy* is read against the background of his other writings, it can hardly be denied that he has given a thorough and

permanently valuable treatment of the immensely complicated problem of the rational and non-rational aspects of religious experience and the relations between them.

Chapter III

BERGSON'S DUALISTIC THEORY OF RELIGION

THE most recent attempt to work out a theory of religious experience on a large scale is that of Henri Bergson in his *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. This work presents the results of many years of reflection upon the problems of the nature and psychological roots of religion and the closely related sphere of morality. With its publication Bergson's philosophy has attained a well-rounded and systematic development. Bergson has not, of course, been primarily concerned to complete a system. All of his work has been marked by careful adherence to empirical method, as he understands it, and he has been reported as remarking that he never wrote a book until he felt compelled to do so by inward necessity.¹ But from first to last Bergson's writings have displayed an extraordinary unity of point of view and harmony of development. Every step of his thought is marked by freshness and originality, so that its course could not have been seen in advance, yet in retrospect it gives the impression of a well-planned

¹Eugene W. Lyman, "Bergson's Philosophy of Religion." *The Review of Religion*, 1:249 (1937).

and articulated whole. Indeed Bergson's thought may itself be regarded as a creative evolution, the product of an impetus both vital and rational.

For a generation Bergson has been the central figure of French philosophy. He has made himself the heir of its most important traditions and has given them a new development. In his youth he was profoundly influenced by positivism and mechanistic theories of evolution. He had received a thorough training in mathematics and was committed to the mathematical methods of physical science. But difficulties with the problems of motion and time led him to the conclusion that these methods take no adequate account of real change and duration as we perceive them in immediate experience. This use of intuition, and the view of the self and of freedom to which it led, brought Bergson into touch with the spiritualistic stream in French philosophy which runs from Maine de Biran through Lachelier and Ravaisson to Boutroux.² It must not be supposed, however, that Bergson simply transferred his allegiance from one philosophical school to another. He has repudiated the positivist rejection of metaphysics but has remained under the influence of positivistic interpretations in particular fields, especially in sociology and religion. He has steadfastly attempted to do justice to the facts and methods of science and to show that they are perfectly valid for certain aspects of experience. But he

² J. Chevalier, *Henri Bergson*, chap. II.

insists that they are not adequate for the whole of experience and, therefore, must be supplemented by a more subtle and inclusive empirical method which makes use of intuition. Bergson has expressed his conception of the task of philosophy as follows:

"Let us accept science in all its concrete complexity; then let us recommence, with this new science as its material, a task like that which ancient metaphysicians undertook with the simpler science of their day. We must break the mathematical framework, take account of biological, psychological and sociological sciences, and upon this larger base erect a metaphysics capable of going higher and higher by means of the continuous, progressive and organized effort of all philosophers who are united in the same respect for experience."³

Perhaps it is the need of reconciling these divergent tendencies in his thought—together with the prestige which Descartes gave to this way of thinking—which has impelled Bergson to espouse several forms of dualism. Whatever the causes may have been, Bergson is evidently fond of employing a dualistic method of analysis. Confronted with a complex phenomenon, he is likely to analyze it into two sharply contrasted components. For example, in *Matter and Memory* he distinguishes between pure perception and pure memory and explains actual perception as the product of the interaction of these two factors. In his recent work he makes a similar distinction between two

³ Quoted by John Dewey in his Introduction to *A Contribution to a Bibliography of Henri Bergson*, p. ix.

sharply contrasted types of morality and religion, although he is forced to admit that most actual morality and religion must be regarded as mixtures of the two types. This is obviously a convenient method of analysis, and it can be very enlightening if it is employed with a careful regard for empirical indications of cleavage, but our suspicions are aroused when it is too consistently utilized. Later on we shall notice certain difficulties into which Bergson is carried by the use of this method. Here we may simply remark that it is almost impossible to refrain from giving a superior metaphysical status to the products of such an analysis, and to avoid allowing it to distort one's empirical approach to the facts.

The two most basic examples of this tendency in Bergson are his methodological dualism of intelligence and intuition, and the peculiar form of metaphysical dualism which underlies his doctrine of creative evolution. The two theories are closely bound up together in a relationship of mutual implication, and it would be difficult to say whether one is more fundamental than the other.

Bergson maintains that intellectual analysis and intuition are two distinct and complementary ways of knowing. In the first instance the distinction is that between immediate experience and mediate knowledge, and is essentially the same as that which James makes between acquaintance-knowledge and knowledge-about. Bergson's view of the nature and limi-

tations of conceptual knowledge is similar to that of James. Concepts are instruments utilized for practical ends and are necessarily abstract and static. This situation is unobjectionable when the objects which they symbolize are relatively static, material things, but it is a serious shortcoming when they are the ever-changing realities of biological and psychical life. Science, therefore, yields a partial and abstract picture of the world, and must be supplemented by intuition.

Professor Dewey has given the warning that intuition in Bergson's thought has none of the connotations of the *a priori* which English-speaking readers are likely to attach to the term.⁴ With Bergson it is an empirical activity, a method which "demands uninterrupted contact with reality." But Bergson's descriptions of intuition are not always consistent with one another, and it is evident that he does not always mean the same thing by it.⁵ Its fundamental meaning is that of immediate experience, especially in the form of pure perception, *i.e.*, perception with all thinking, imagining, and memory eliminated. Such experience, Bergson holds, is cognitive awareness of "a reality that is external and yet given immediately to the mind . . . This reality is mobility."⁶ The following statement refers to intuition in this sense, and

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁵ Høffding, *Modern Philosophers and Lectures on Bergson*, pp. 241-259.

⁶ Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 65.

also reveals its most obvious limitation. "By intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible."⁷ Bergson speaks sometimes of a metaphysics which dispenses with symbols,⁸ but it is evident that such a metaphysics would be of very little use. Hence he cherishes the hope that metaphysics may "free itself from rigid and ready-made concepts in order to create a kind very different from those which we habitually use; I mean supple, mobile, and almost fluid representations, always ready to mould themselves on the fleeting forms of intuition."⁹ In the same vein he also says, referring to intelligence modelled upon intuition: "It can place itself within the mobile reality, and adopt its ceaselessly changing direction; in short, can grasp it by means of that intellectual sympathy which we call intuition . . . In this way it will attain to fluid concepts, capable of following reality in all its sinuosities and of adopting the very movement of the inward life of things."¹⁰ Many times when Bergson speaks of intuition as the method of metaphysics or of the sciences of life, it is evident that this is what he has in mind.

In his *Creative Evolution* Bergson connects intuition with instinct. For example the following: "By

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely.”¹¹ Beside this passage may be placed two others: “If instinct is, above all, the faculty of using an organized natural instrument, it must involve innate knowledge (potential or unconscious, it is true), both of this instrument and of the object to which it is applied.”¹² “If the consciousness that slumbers in it [instinct] should awake . . . it would give up to us the most intimate secrets of life.”¹³ It would be unfair to Bergson to lay too much stress upon this conception of intuition, however, or to take these passages too literally. For in response to criticism and what he considers misunderstanding of his position at this point, he has said: “I have never claimed that intelligence should be replaced by something else, or that instinct should be preferred to it. I have simply tried to show that when we leave the realm of mathematical and physical objects to enter that of life and consciousness, we need to appeal to a certain sense of life . . . which has its origin in the same vital impetus as instinct, although, strictly speaking, instinct is wholly different.”¹⁴

Bergson makes use of a conception of intuition which is somewhat different from any of the forego-

¹¹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 176.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁴ Bergson: “A propos de l'évolution de l'intelligence géométrique.” *Revue de Métaphysique et de la Morale*, 16:30 (1908).

ing versions when he says it is very like the mental effort by which a writer places himself at the heart of his subject.¹⁵ He points out that it requires an extensive mastery of knowledge, but is something other than a mere summary or synthesis of that knowledge. The first part of the following statement is obviously an over-statement, but the second part is a precise indication of the essential point: "In this sense metaphysics [*i.e.*, metaphysical intuition] has nothing in common with a generalization of facts, and nevertheless it might be defined as integral experience."¹⁶

It is clear that intuition in this sense should be contrasted quite sharply with intuition as immediate experience of the passing flux. And we may well question whether in either sense it is an essentially cognitive function supplementary to intelligence. In Bergson's first usage, intuition is precognitive experience, while in the last-mentioned, it is postcognitive. It is by confusing these two meanings and combining with the product the notions of fluid concepts and of instinct, that Bergson gets his view of intuition as a superior way of knowing and the proper method of metaphysics.

The problem of the real nature of intelligence and intuition and their relation to each other led Bergson to a prolonged study of biology and the theory of

¹⁵ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 90.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

evolution. The result was his theory of creative evolution. He begins by arguing that logical thought is incapable of representing the true nature of life and the full meaning of evolution because its categories are formed for purely practical ends and for dealing with material objects. The true nature of evolution is revealed in intuition to be an essentially free and creative process or growth. It is not to be thought of in terms of mechanism or of conscious purpose, but as a current of life carried forward by a vital impetus. The current of life surges forward in essentially unpredictable fashion, creating novel forms but expending its energy in the process. Material things are to be thought of as the phases of "detension," relaxation or slowing down in the vital stream, the product of the interaction of the upward-mounting current of life and the descending current or inertia of matter. Bergson thus transforms the dualism of mind and matter into a dualism of two inverse movements. He tries to avoid a strict dualism by maintaining that immobility is simply the limit of the slowing down of motion, but this does not explain the tendency to slowing down itself. The crucial question has been posed by J. de Tonquédec: "How can it be understood that pure mobility, mobility by essence, the totally, uniquely mobile, can have a tendency to immobilize itself?"¹⁷

With this brief sketch of some of the dominant

¹⁷ J. de Tonquédec, *Sur la philosophie Bergsonienne*, p. 107.

motives of Bergson's thought as a background, we may proceed to an examination of his theory of the nature of religion and morality. According to Bergson there are two distinct types of both morality and religion. On the one hand is the "closed morality" which is a natural product and instrument of man's life in particular social groups; on the other is the "open morality" which transcends the limits of those groups and is exemplified in the lives of heroes and saints. With each of these kinds of morality a type of religion is closely associated. Closed morality finds sanction and support in "static religion," while open morality is the product of "dynamic religion," which Bergson identifies with mysticism. Bergson insists that there is no direct passage from the first type of morality and religion to the second. Open morality is not achieved by a gradual broadening of the sphere of closed morality, and dynamic religion does not develop out of static religion, for each type has a distinct source in the human constitution and human experience.

This approach to morality and religion is an application and extension of the philosophy of creative evolution. Morality and religion are regarded as interrelated products of evolutionary development, and are treated within the general framework of Bergson's theory of the process. The evolutionary phases of conservative stability and creative advance reappear in the two forms of morality and religion.

Closed morality and static religion correspond to the inertia of mechanism and automatism, while open morality and dynamic religion represent the forward movement of the vital impetus. The former type is characteristic of the human species as a temporary stopping-place in the advancing movement, while the latter expresses the effort of life to lift mankind to a new level.

From the standpoint of our interest in religious experience we are concerned primarily with Bergson's doctrine that there are two contrasting types of religion and that they have two distinct sources in experience. But it is impossible to treat these views in isolation from his theory as a whole. Bergson's discussion of religion is inextricably bound up with his treatment of morality, for the very classification of religion into static and dynamic forms is determined by the moral consequences of religion. The greater part of religion is said to be static because Bergson believes it is among the forces making for stability in human societies, while mysticism is regarded as a dynamic force contributing to social mobility. We must, therefore, follow Bergson's own method and approach the two types of religion through an examination of the two types of morality. Perhaps it is appropriate to remark at this point that the term morality is generally given the wide sense of the French *morale* rather than the narrower meaning which it usually bears in English.

As we have already seen, the basic contention of Bergson's ethical theory is that there are two utterly distinct types and sources of morality. The common morality of specific social duties originated in limited social groups and by its very nature is applicable only within such "closed" societies; therefore we must sharply distinguish between it and the "open" morality which seeks to apply itself to humanity as such without restriction. The two types of morality have different origins and come to the ordinary individual in different ways. The former originates in group life and is a product of the effort of a social group to maintain itself. It is imposed by the group upon its individual members and appears to them as a set of duties supported by an imperative more or less categorical. The latter originates in the feelings and mystical experiences of particular individuals, who through these experiences gain visions of the future possibilities of mankind, and in some cases incarnate these envisioned possibilities in their own lives. These privileged persons—prophets, saints, and heroes—evoke in other men aspirations toward the higher life and draw them by the power of their example. One kind of morality aims at social cohesion and acts as a conservative influence; the other aims at a wider community and thus is a force making for progress. "Hence between the first morality and the second lies the whole distance between repose and movement."¹⁸

¹⁸ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, p. 49.

Closed morality is a natural aspect of man's life and is in harmony with the basic tendencies in human nature. Bergson says: "It is for closed, simple societies that the moral structure, original and fundamental in man, is made . . . Man, fresh from the hands of nature, was a being both intelligent and social, his sociability being devised to find its scope in small communities, his intelligence being designed to further individual and group life."¹⁹ Bergson warns his readers, of course, that when he speaks of design and intention in nature, he does so only metaphorically. "We do not assert that nature has, strictly speaking, designed or foreseen anything whatever. But we have the right to proceed like a biologist, who speaks of nature's intentions every time he assigns a function to an organ: he merely expresses thus the adequateness of the organ to the function."²⁰ No one would deny that the moral constitution of primitive man fits him primarily for life in the closed and simple society of the tribe. But is this true also of civilized man? Bergson replies that it must be, for to hold otherwise is to assume the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Beneath the accumulated mass of habits which are transmitted by education there are organic tendencies which persist relatively unchanged and result in a basic pattern of obligations. Furthermore, our civilized communities, though so much

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

larger and more complex than primitive communities, are also closed societies. And if anyone doubts that the morality in which they really believe is closed morality, let him look at the behavior of these societies in war. "Our social duties aim at social cohesion; whether we will or no they compose for us an attitude which is that of discipline in the face of the enemy . . . Who can help seeing that social cohesion is largely due to the necessity for a community to protect itself against others, and that it is primarily as against all other men that we love the men with whom we live?" ²¹

The ties which bind individuals to the societies of which they are members are moral obligations. Therefore, in order to understand closed morality and the static religion which supports it, it is necessary to discover the nature of obligation. And since closed morality is the natural morality of human societies, Bergson takes as his starting-point the analogy between social order and the general order of nature. Moral obligations produce in society a regularity which is comparable to the regularity of nature. Their rôle is similar to that of the ties which bind the cell to its function in the organism and the bee to its proper activity in the hive. Obligation is to be regarded, then, not as something unique, but as a species of natural bond. If we look at it from the widest point of view, which with Bergson is that of

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24.

evolution as a creative process, we shall see it as a manifestation of the necessity which prevades all nature. Physical or organic necessity binds the cell to its function in the organism, and necessity in the form of instinct holds the bee to its proper place in the hive. In the case of man in society, necessity takes a still different form, for now it makes room for freedom and intelligence. This is obligation—"the form assumed by necessity in the realm of life, when it demands, for the accomplishment of certain ends, intelligence, choice, and therefore liberty."²² In another place Bergson says that "the sense of this necessity, together with the consciousness of being able to evade it"²³ is just what we call obligation. And although, properly speaking, no one obligation is instinctive, our obligations taken together function as "a virtual instinct, like that which lies behind the habit of speech."²⁴ What we may somewhat loosely call social instinct is therefore the fundamental element in obligation and the basis of closed morality.

The statement that obligation functions like an instinct does not tell us much about its actual nature. Hence, Bergson combines with this account another analysis in which he attempts to describe the mechanism by which obligation works. Any particular obligation has its origin in a command of society addressed

²² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

to its members. The individual responds to the command, and in the course of time these responses become habits. Bergson writes: "Each of these habits of obedience exerts a pressure on our will. We can evade it, but then we are attracted towards it, drawn back to it, like a pendulum which has swung away from the vertical. A certain order of things has been upset, it *must be* restored. In a word, as with all habits, we feel a sense of obligation." ²⁵

Bergson insists, moreover, that these habits do not function separately. Social pressure produces in us not only specific habits but also a more general "habit of contracting these habits," that is, of responding to the social claim. All these habits interpenetrate and draw strength from one another, and therefore function as a "solid block" or "totality of obligation." It is this block of habits which takes the place of instinct in man and performs the same function. The following statement is typical: "Conceive obligation as weighing on the will like a habit, each obligation dragging behind it the accumulated mass of the others, and utilizing thus for the pressure it is exerting the weight of the whole; here you have the totality of obligation for a simple, elementary, moral conscience." ²⁶

It is important to notice that this analysis of moral obligation in terms of social pressure contains the

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 17. Cf. p. 2 and p. 18.

assumption that the pressure comes from society *as a whole*. This is clearly evident in the interesting passage at the beginning of *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*:

"The remembrance of forbidden fruit is the earliest thing in the memory of each of us, as it is in that of mankind . . . What a childhood we should have had if only we had been left to do as we pleased! We should have flitted from pleasure to pleasure. But all of a sudden an obstacle arose, neither visible nor tangible: a prohibition. Why did we obey? The question hardly occurred to us. We had formed the habit of deferring to our parents and teachers. All the same we knew very well that it was because they were our parents, because they were our teachers. Therefore, in our eyes, their authority came less from themselves than from their status in relation to us. They occupied a certain station; that was the source of the command, which, had it issued from some other quarter, would not have possessed the same weight. In other words, parents and teachers seemed to act by proxy. We did not fully realize this, but behind our parents and teachers we had an inkling of some enormous, or rather some shadowy, thing that exerted pressure on us through them. Later we would say it was society. And speculating upon it, we should compare it to an organism whose cells, united by imperceptible links, fall into their respective places in a highly developed hierarchy, and for the greatest good of the whole naturally submit to a discipline that may demand the sacrifice of the part."

This may be a satisfactory account of the developing notions of French children who are brought up in the traditions of nationalism and positivism, but it will

hardly serve as an empirical description of the genesis of moral obligations. Bergson is doubtless right in saying that a child obeys his parents and teachers because of their status in relation to him. But that is a long way from meaning, as Bergson intends it to mean, that their status is that of representatives of society as a whole. Behind them we may discern some particular social group adding the weight of its authority to theirs, but beyond this we have no empirical justification in going. Bergson is under the influence of a positivist sociology which regards all societies as built upon the model of the primitive tribe. In this view, the nation, of course, takes the place of the tribe. Undoubtedly the nation tends at times to assume this character, especially in the totalitarian states, but generally society is a complex of overlapping and interrelated groups. The individual is subject to the pressures of more than one "closed society." But although Bergson's positivism profoundly influences his theory of closed morality, it does not vitiate it. It is still relevant to a more pluralistic and empirical social theory.

Bergson is not clear on the question of how the habits formed in response to social pressures become united into a totality, for when he deals with this point he seems also to be thinking of the relation of the individual to society. Thus his positivist conception of society evidently lies at the bottom of his notion of the "totality of obligation": the unitary society is reflected in the solid block of habit. Berg-

son suggests that this interrelationship of habits is based in part upon judgments, but he lays more emphasis upon feelings and elements of sheer mysticism. His statement is as follows:

"It should be noted that all habits of this nature lend one another mutual support. Although we may not speculate on their essence and on their origin, we feel that they are inter-related, being demanded of us by our immediate surroundings, or by the surroundings of those surroundings, and so on to the uttermost limit, which would be society. Each one corresponds, directly or indirectly, to a social necessity; and so they all hang together, they form a solid block. Many of them would be trivial obligations if they appeared singly. But they are an integral part of obligation in general, and this whole, which is what it is owing to the contributions of its parts, in its turn confers upon each one the undivided authority of the totality. Thus the sum-total comes to the aid of each of its parts, and the general sentence 'do what duty bids' triumphs over the hesitations we might feel in the presence of a single duty. As a matter of fact, we do not explicitly think of a mass of partial duties added together and constituting a single total obligation. Perhaps there is not really an aggregation of parts. The strength which one obligation derives from all the others is rather to be compared to the breath of life drawn, complete and indivisible, by each of the cells from the depths of the organism of which it is an element. Society, present within each of its members, has claims which, whether great or small, each express the sum-total of its vitality."²⁷

We have already remarked that man's possession of intelligence accounts for the fact that the social

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3.

bond takes the form of obligation. If man were not intelligent, Bergson maintains, obligation would be purely instinctive, and human societies would more closely resemble those of the ants and bees. But man has developed in another line of evolution in which instinct has increasingly been replaced by intelligence, and with intelligence came freedom, choice, and the possibility of progress. The variety and plasticity of human societies and cultures are consequences of man's intelligence with its power to devise instruments and adapt means to ends. Bergson argues, however, that this development of intelligence carried a potential danger to human society. Progress is purchased at the price of stability, and the individual initiative which intelligence fosters contains a threat to social cohesion. The nature of intelligence is such that it will not, like instinct, remain subordinate to sociability. An intelligent creature will not permanently content himself with devising means for attaining fixed ends, but will sooner or later begin to criticize the ends themselves. He will not only question the utility of particular customs but will perceive the possibility of conflict between his own interests and those of society. Bergson argues that intelligence "is a faculty used naturally by the individual to meet the difficulties of life; it will not follow the direction of a force which, on the contrary, is working for the species, and which, if it considers the individual at all, does so in the interest of the species. It will make

straight for selfish decisions.”²⁸ Bergson is very insistent on this point, that if intelligence were left to itself, it would foster egoism. But it has not been left to itself; nature has provided a means of strengthening the force of social obligation and of answering the objections raised against it by intelligence. This is static religion, “a defensive reaction of nature against the dissolvent power of intelligence.”²⁹

Religion has various methods of strengthening the bonds which attach the members of a particular society to one another. Bergson does not undertake to give a complete account of them, but he points to certain aspects of religion which increase social solidarity, particularly among peoples at simple and more or less primitive levels of development. Among such peoples little or no distinction is made between essential and unessential customs; all customs are obligatory and have a religious character. The relation between morality and religion is thus greatly simplified in rudimentary societies. “Originally the whole of morality is custom; and as religion forbids any departure from custom, morality is coextensive with religion.”³⁰ These *taboos* doubtless originated through a real or imagined connection with some social interest; then, at a later stage, there arose the notion of a divine power as the source of these pro-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

hibitions and the sanctions by which they are upheld. When a transgression occurs, the penalty is believed to fall not only on the offending individual but upon the whole society. Moral guilt tends to be thought of as a kind of physical contamination which can harm the entire society which permits it to exist.

In ways such as these religion operates quite directly to further social stability and cohesion. Equally important is its indirect influence upon the preservation of society through strengthening the lives of individuals. Bergson gives two principal illustrations of this function. As in the former examples, religion arises in order to counterbalance the influence of intelligence at points where it tends to weaken the vital impetus. In the first place, Bergson points out, there is danger to the individual and to society in man's recognition of the inevitability of death. The effect of this knowledge would certainly be a slowing down of the movement of life if religion did not come forward with its vision of life after death. In a similar way, religion provides assurance against the uncertainties of an unforeseeable future. Under its influence man postulates friendly powers interested in his success and unfriendly powers to explain his failures. The primitive man does not overlook sequences of cause and effect, but he feels that the cause must be equal to the effect. Hence, if the effect has great human significance he tends to attribute intention to the cause. He comes to believe in entities that have

some elements of personality, in "effective presences" which take some account of man. Thus his vital demand for a meaningful position in the universe is satisfied. If we combine this group of functions with that previously described, we come to Bergson's final definition of static religion: "It is a defensive reaction of nature against what might be depressing for the individual and dissolvent for society, in the exercise of intelligence."³¹

Among the various means by which religion fulfills its protective function, Bergson lays the greatest emphasis upon myth-making. He nowhere attempts a formal definition of religious myth, but his meaning is fairly clear. The following statement is perhaps the most illuminating:

"Static religion, such as we find it when it stands alone, attaches man to life, and consequently the individual to society, by telling him tales on a par with those with which we lull children to sleep. Of course they are not like other stories. Being produced by the myth-making function in response to an actual need and not for mere pleasure, they counterfeit reality as actually perceived, to the point of making us act accordingly: other creations of the imagination have this same tendency, but they do not demand our compliance; they can remain just ideas; whereas the former are ideomotory. They are none the less myths, which critical minds, as we have seen, often accept in fact, but which they should, by rights, reject."³²

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

How can we account for the fact that man, a rational creature, has developed these myths and taken them so seriously? Bergson rejects Lévy-Bruhl's contention that they are the result of a primitive mentality unlike that of modern man, for this assumes that acquired characteristics are transmitted by inheritance. He likewise objects to Durkheim's view that they are the product, not of individual minds, but of a collective mind with its own distinctive structure and categories, for this theory forgets that man is by nature a social creature. The explanation is to be found in the fact that religious myths and practices and the experiences in which they originate arise in response to vital needs. Religion does not belong to the realm of speculation but to that of action, and its ideas can be understood and evaluated only within their proper setting.

This account of religion links it up with the imagination. But that is a vague term which covers many different functions. We are concerned here, according to Bergson, with the function which produces "phantasms" or fictional representations, and which may be called the "myth-making function" or "faculty." (*fonction fabulatrice*.) It is the source, not only of mythology itself but also of the drama and all imaginative literature. The myths of religion are among its products; but in a deeper sense, religion is its cause rather than its effect, for in the connection of religion with social security we find the vital need which accounts for the existence of the faculty.

"Here we get at what we have shown to be a fundamental demand of life: this demand has called into being the myth-making faculty; the myth-making function is thus to be deduced from the conditions of existence of the human species."³³ But though it was developed by and for the sake of religion, the myth-making function could also be employed for the less strictly necessary pursuits of the drama and literature. Through stimulating the imaginative faculties religion became the mother of the arts.

We already have explored the nature of the vital and social needs to which the myth-making function is a response; now we must observe the way in which this function operates.

"Now what would nature have done, after creating intelligent beings, if she had wanted to guard against certain dangers of intellectual activity without compromising the future of intelligence? . . . If intelligence was to be kept at the outset from sliding down a slope which was dangerous to the individual and society, it could be only by the statement of apparent facts, by the ghosts of facts; failing real experience, a counterfeit of experience had to be conjured up. A fiction, if its image is vivid and insistent, may indeed masquerade as perception and in that way prevent or modify action. A systematically false experience, confronting the intelligence, may indeed stop it pushing too far the conclusions it deduces from a true experience. It is in some such fashion that nature has proceeded."³⁴

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Thus Bergson does not think of the myth-making function primarily in intellectual terms but as rooted in experiences. It is the power of producing, not only ideas but "apparent facts" and "counterfeits of experience." We note further that it operates as a "counterpoise to intelligence." Since it does so, it is behaving like an instinct, for in Bergson's view instinct is a function complementary to intelligence.

"We should say that the tendency under consideration is an instinct, were it not that it is precisely in the place of an instinct that these phantasmic images arise in the mind. They play a part which *might* have devolved on instinct, and which would actually do so in a being devoid of intelligence." ³⁵

"If this counterpoise cannot be instinct itself, for the very reason that its place has been taken by intelligence, the same effect must be produced by a virtuality of instinct, or, if you prefer it, by the residue of instinct which survives on the fringe of intelligence: it cannot exercise direct action, but, since intelligence works on representations, it will call up 'imaginary' ones, which will hold their own against the representation of reality and will succeed, through the agency of intelligence itself, in counteracting the work of intelligence. This would be the explanation of the myth-making faculty." ³⁶

In order to illustrate how experiences of this sort can be produced by a quasi-instinctive vital tendency, Bergson cites the case of a woman who was prevented

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

from stepping into an open elevator shaft by an hallucination of the operator pushing her back.³⁷ He interprets this as a defensive reaction of the "instinctive or somnambulistic self," which acted more quickly and surely than thought could have done, throwing her backwards and simultaneously evoking the hallucinatory perception which explained the movement. Bergson evidently intends this example to serve as a model for the understanding of religious experience. That is to say, the experiences which form the foundations of religious myths and beliefs are to be accounted for as products of essentially the same mechanism as that which produced this picturesque hallucination. Surely this is an example of that same tendency to regard the extreme and abnormal case as typical, for which William James has been so widely criticized. But as a matter of fact, in Bergson's own description of the religious experiences which he believes underlie such widespread conceptions as *taboo*, *mana*, the soul and the after-life, gods and other divine beings, the element of hallucination plays a very small part indeed. What is important in Bergson's account of these experiences is the contention that certain persistent forms of experience and tendencies of interpretation are determined by vital interests.

The most basic of these persistent tendencies toward certain forms of experience and interpretation may be observed in ourselves as well as among

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

primitive peoples. As an example, Bergson cites William James's account of the San Francisco earthquake and how he could not help personifying it.³⁸ This tendency and the experiences which it controls must underlie the development of ideas of gods and other divine beings. The following passage expresses the essential points in Bergson's notion of how these ideas have developed:

"If our analyses are correct, what was first conceived was neither an impersonal force nor spirits already individualized: man simply attributed purpose to things and events, as if nature had eyes everywhere which she focussed on man. That this is an original tendency, we can all verify when a sudden shock arouses the primitive man dormant within us all. What we feel in these cases is the sensation of an *efficient presence*; the nature of this presence is of little consequence, the essential point is its efficiency; the moment there is any regard for us, even if the intention is not good, we begin to count for something in the universe."³⁹

From this primitive belief—developed in response to a vital impulsion—two lines of development took place, toward magic and toward higher religion. Magic exaggerated the materiality of the experienced power and tried to win control over it; religion approached it from the moral side and tended to think of it as a personality to be won over by prayer. Both developments show vital tendencies at work: "It is,

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143. Cf. William James, *Memories and Studies*, pp. 209-214.

³⁹ *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, p. 165.

then, from the demands of an efficient magic that there arose a conception such as *mana*, an improverishment or a materialization of the original belief: and it is the desire to obtain favours that drew from the same belief, in the opposite direction, spirits and gods."⁴⁰ Belief in an ultimate divine power is an inescapable vital necessity, for though "each distinct god is contingent . . . the godhead in general is necessary."⁴¹

It is noteworthy, moreover, that in his actual examples, Bergson does not follow any rigid scheme or theory as to the nature of these underlying tendencies. In his discussion of the origin of the belief in a continuation of life after death, he says, "It is the *yearning* after continued action that has led to the belief in an after-life."⁴² We have already observed that in his account of the origin of belief in divine beings he emphasizes man's desire to feel that he counts for something in the universe. These examples show that, in spite of Bergson's often reiterated statement that the vital interests underlying static religion are defensive reactions, it would be a mistake to conclude that he regards them as essentially negative in character. The fact is that they are manifestations of what is an essentially positive force, the vital impetus.

Recognition of this fact impels us to question whether Bergson is justified in discussing all religious

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

experience, with the exception of mysticism, under the heading of static religion. If religious experiences and their consequent myths and beliefs are conditioned by vital interests, it is surely more likely that some of them should be dynamic influences than that all of them should be static and merely defensive in effect. An empirical study of the actual rôles of religious experiences, myths, and beliefs, in history, would certainly bear out this interpretation rather than that of Bergson. The ancient Hebrews were sustained in their conquest and defense of Palestine and in the development of their culture there by a faith in Yahweh which included many mythical elements. It would be completely artificial to hold that the mythical elements in their religion were purely static and that the dynamic and universalistic qualities came from mysticism. One of the best illustrations of religious longing and belief taking the form of myth is found in the apocalyptic expectations of the early Christians, and yet Georges Sorel cites it as a prime example of the dynamic quality and nature of myths.⁴³ His treatment of myth is avowedly based upon the thought of Bergson, but he stresses their active and volitional character. Sorel's view is doubtless as one-sided as Bergson's but it serves to correct the contention that all religion which is derived from the myth-making function is static and a servant of closed morality.

⁴³ Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, pp. 22-36, 133-137.

We have seen that in Bergson's view static religion arises in order to provide the social cohesion and individual confidence which are menaced by intelligence. But there are obvious reasons why it cannot permanently achieve these ends. In the first place, it is itself subject to the dissolving influence of intelligence. As men develop the capacity to distinguish between fact and fancy, between scientific interpretation of the environment and the constructions of the myth-making faculty, and discover that religion has been "telling them tales on a par with those with which we lull children to sleep," its practical efficacy is fatally undermined. Moreover, religion which is harnessed to closed morality increases the cohesiveness of any particular society only by contrasting it with other societies. The seeds of conflict are implanted in the partial loyalties which are thereby aroused. Struggle between groups has the immediate effect of enhancing the loyalty of their members and increasing the power and efficiency of the groups, but its long range effects are destructive and by no means limited to the defeated. Victors and vanquished alike may be weakened and destroyed by the very forces which, up to a point, are valuable for preserving them. Bergson is deeply aware of the tragic problems which confront the contemporary world as a result of the conflicts between closed societies.

But is there not some way by which the vital forces of religion can be used in the furtherance of wider

and more permanent ends? Is there not some form of religion which can perform its individual and social functions without becoming subservient to the closed and the static? Bergson suggests an answer to these questions by propounding another: "Why should not man recover the confidence he lacks, or which has perhaps been undermined by reflection, by turning back for fresh impetus in the direction from which that impetus came?"⁴⁴ By intuition man can make contact with the current of life itself and allow it to work through him. By realizing his identity with the vital impetus, he may release its energies for a new creative advance. Different as it is from static religion, this dynamic process should still be called religion, for as Bergson says, "it insures the soul, to a pre-eminent degree, the security and the serenity which it is the function of static religion to provide."⁴⁵

Bergson holds that the essential and specifically religious element in dynamic religion and the open morality which it produces is mysticism. And mysticism here does not mean a philosophy but an experience "taken in its immediacy apart from all interpretation."⁴⁶ The following definition of the meaning and purpose of mysticism is proposed: "In our eyes, the ultimate end of mysticism is the establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

effort is of God, if it is not God himself. The great mystic is to be conceived as an individual being, capable of transcending the limitations imposed on the species by its material nature, thus continuing and extending the divine action."⁴⁷ Bergson thus interprets the nature of mysticism in accordance with his metaphysics of creative evolution and his theory of intuition. The essence of mysticism is not contemplation but action. Its goal is neither knowledge nor ecstasy but identification with the current of life, and therefore participation in its creative advance.

The historical forms of mysticism are evaluated in terms of this conception. Bergson holds that the pagan mystery-religions had very little mysticism in them, though Orphism gave a mystical impetus to Platonism which worked itself out finally in the mysticism of Plotinus. But Plotinus was not a thoroughgoing mystic, for he did not get beyond the stage of ecstasy. In regarding action as a weakening of contemplation, he remained faithful to Greek intellectualism. Oriental mysticism was prevented from attaining full development by the pessimism of Indian thought. A basic sense of the worthlessness of human activity made Hindus and Buddhists alike envisage their goal as escape from life and absorption into the whole. This ultimate conviction was attained, not simply intellectually, but as a mystic experience. Yet it was not a complete mysticism, for it stopped short

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

of "action, creation, love."⁴⁸ Only the great Christian mystics have attained to complete mysticism. They passed through stages which correspond to the mysticism of the ancients, but regarded them as merely preliminary. The great mystics thought of their ecstasies and visions as incidental and warned against the dangers of concentrating on them. According to their descriptions of the mystic way, the stage of ecstasy is succeeded by one of gloom and despair, and then by the final stage which Bergson describes in eloquent words: "*Now* it is God who is acting through the soul, in the soul; the union is total, therefore final . . . Henceforth for the soul there is a superabundance of life."⁴⁹ The great Christian mystics—Bergson names St. Paul, St. Teresa, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Francis, and Joan of Arc—were people of action, from whose "increased vitality there radiated an extraordinary energy, daring, power of conception and realization."⁵⁰ The active element in Christian mysticism came originally from the Hebrew prophets and from Christ. Of Christ, Bergson says: "If the great mystics are indeed such as we have described them, they are the imitators, and original but incomplete continuators, of what the Christ of the Gospels was completely."⁵¹ Christianity is regarded as in essence a popularization of mysticism,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-214.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

although, of course, it has absorbed many elements of static and mythical religion.

In Bergson's view this mysticism of the vital impetus is the real source of universalistic or open morality. Closed morality cannot develop into open morality by the progressive widening of the area either of natural sympathies or of rational benevolence. "We are fond of saying that the apprenticeship to civic virtue is served in the family, and that in the same way, from holding our country dear, we learn to love mankind. Our sympathies are supposed to broaden out in an unbroken progression, to expand while remaining identical, and to end by embracing all humanity. This is *a priori* reasoning, the result of a purely intellectualist conception of the soul."⁵² It is true that the family virtues help to cultivate the civic virtues but this is because family and community are both closed societies. But between the society in which we live and humanity in general there is all the difference between the closed and the open, a difference in essence which can only be surmounted by a creative advance of the vital impetus. This is what true mysticism represents—a renewed effort of the creative impulse working through exceptional individuals and seeking to lift mankind to a new level. Bergson writes: "Through these geniuses of the will, the impetus of life, traversing matter, wrests from it, for the future of the species, promises such as were

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

out of the question when the species was being constituted. Hence in passing from social solidarity to the brotherhood of man, we break with one particular nature, but not with all nature. It might be said, by slightly distorting the terms of Spinoza, that it is to get back to *natura naturans* that we break away from *natura naturata*.”⁵³

In order to understand how the great advances from closed to open morality are made, we must study the mystics and endeavor to place ourselves inside their situation by an effort of intuition. We then discover that the mystic experience produces a new feeling or emotion, accompanied by a sense of liberation from the values of ordinary life. An ordinary emotion, Bergson says, is “infra-intellectual”; that is, it is simply an affective reaction to some prior idea. The feeling induced by mystical experience, on the other hand, is “supra-intellectual,” because it is prior to and creative of ideas. Such a feeling is said to be “pregnant with representations”; it is an emotion which “begets thought.” An emotion of this type is at the source of every genuinely creative advance in art, music, literature. Bergson writes: “Anyone engaged in writing has been in a position to feel the difference between an intelligence left to itself and that which burns with the fire of an original and unique emotion, born of the identification of the author with his subject, that is to say, of intuition. In the first case the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

mind cold-hammers the materials, combining together ideas long since cast into words and which society supplies in a solid form. In the second, it would seem that the solid materials supplied by intelligence first melt and mix, then solidify into fresh ideas now shaped by the creative mind itself."⁵⁴ Our author holds that creative advances in morality and religion come about in an exactly analogous way. Mystic experience gives rise to a new emotion which works itself out both in the sphere of ideas and in that of action. Christian charity or love is an example—a genuinely new feeling, born of mystical experience, and forming the foundation of a new level of open morality.

Thus the true significance of mysticism lies in the action, the type of life, to which it leads. We have called it open morality; we might better call it the life of absolute love. Bergson insists that this love is something qualitatively different from natural sympathy or affection, the "love" which exists in closed societies and which by its very nature is partial and limited. Nor is it simply an unlimited rational benevolence, a product of the idea of human brotherhood. "The mystic love of humanity is a very different thing . . . Coinciding with God's love for His handiwork, a love which has been the source of everything, it would yield up, to anyone who knew how to question it, the secret of creation. It is still more meta-

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

physical than moral in its essence. What it wants to do, with God's help, is to complete the creation of the human species . . . its direction is exactly that of the vital impetus; it *is* this impetus itself, communicated in its entirety to exceptional men who in their turn would fain impart it to all humanity." ⁵⁵ The mystic, declares Bergson, has "experienced" a reality beyond the world of sense. "He has felt truth flowing into his soul from its fountain-head like an active force. He can no more help spreading it abroad than the sun can help diffusing its light. Only, it is not by mere words that he will spread it. For the love which consumes him is no longer simply the love of man for God, it is the love of God for all men. Through God, in the strength of God, he loves all mankind with a divine love." ⁵⁶

Yet this view that mysticism is primarily emotion leading to activity does not involve the abandonment of the conviction that mystical experience is a source of knowledge. As we have seen, the emotions involved in mysticism are said to be "above intellect"; that is, are believed to be of a sort from which ideas and doctrines are crystallized. It is significant that in the passages just quoted, Bergson says that the mystic "has felt *truth* flowing into his soul from its fountain-head" and that love possesses a metaphysical "secret" which it would "yield up to anyone who knew how

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

to question it." We cannot escape the inference that Bergsonian intuition is regarded by its author as able to penetrate in some measure to knowledge of that secret. For Bergson assimilates mysticism into his conception of intuition, and, as we remember, he regards intuition as a source of metaphysical knowledge. Hence he writes: "If mysticism is really what we have just said it is, it must furnish us the means of approaching, as it were experimentally, the problem of the existence and the nature of God."⁵⁷

When we say that anything exists we mean that it is "presented in actual or possible experience." God is not an exception to this principle, in spite of the Aristotelian tradition, for "religion, be it static or dynamic, regards Him, above all, as a Being who can hold communication with us."⁵⁸ The fact that some people seem to be utterly incapable of mystical experience does not cast doubt on its reality or its value. The deep-seated agreement among mystics, Bergson declares, "is a sign of an identity of intuition which would find its simplest explanation in the actual existence of the Being with whom they believe themselves to hold intercourse."⁵⁹ Bergson makes no claim that mysticism yields certainty in these matters, but he argues that the converging lines of evidence provided by mysticism, on the one hand, and by the facts which underlie the theory of creative evolution, on the

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

other, give a cumulative probability in favor of a God of love who is both a person and a creative power.⁶⁰ He suggests that a similar combination of scientific evidence and mystical experience supports belief in the survival of the soul after death.⁶¹

A certain amount of confusion is introduced into this argument by the ambiguities in Bergson's theory of intuition. Mysticism is represented both as a source of religious beliefs and as a sphere of experience in which they are verified. Sometimes it appears to be thought of as a mode of immediate experience, while at other times it seems to be a function which produces ideas. Mystical experience is a fact which every philosophy must make room for, but there is serious doubt whether it should be regarded as containing immediate presentations of non-sensible realities. It is not clear that Bergson should be interpreted as maintaining that it does, although it must be admitted that his presentational realism, like that of James, opens the door to such a view. His contention seems to be, rather, that mystical experience contains obscure suggestions and thus gives rise to ideas which develop with self-evidencing or persuasive power. In this way mystical experience may be a source of new and original conceptions. The objection is sometimes made that the ideas which the mystic claims to derive from his mystical experiences are

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 237-240.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 251-254.

really the foundation of those experiences. Bergson's reply is that from the standpoint of psychology it is less likely that a doctrine could give birth to mystical experience than that there should be a religion which is simply an intellectual extract of mysticism. We can agree that mystical experience can hardly be thought of simply as an emotional response to certain doctrines, but it would seem that there is a third possibility more probable than the alternative which Bergson considers, namely, that mystical experience is the product of an organic or temperamental predisposition shared by certain people, and that it avails itself of whatever framework of ideas the mystic may possess. It may either accommodate itself completely to these ideas and therefore seem to confirm them, or it may in some measure produce a rearrangement of the mystic's mental furniture and thus give rise to original conceptions. To adopt a metaphor similar to one which Bergson employs, mystical experience is a kind of melting pot whose contents may either run into already existing intellectual moulds or solidify into novel patterns of thought. But these "intuitions" are properly to be regarded as interpretations of the experience and its meaning. Their status is hypothetical, and the feelings which accompany them are no guarantee of their truth. They can be verified only by the ordinary processes of scientific or philosophical thought.

The distinctive feature of Bergson's treatment of

mysticism, however, lies in his subordination of the intellectual to the emotional and volitional aspects of the experience. In itself this is a great merit of his view, but it must be questioned whether he has correctly interpreted the moral consequences of mysticism. On the face of it there is something very strange in the contention that mysticism is the source of open morality and social mobility, for the usual view is that it has had precisely opposite social effects. It is widely believed, for example, that the mysticism of Hindu religion is one of the most powerful factors making for the stability of Indian society. Bergson would doubtless reply that in this case, and in many others, mysticism has had a conservative and stabilizing effect, but that this is simply the incomplete mysticism which has stopped short at contemplation, while true mysticism is the mysticism of action and love which, by its nature, contributes to the forward movement of social evolution. Now if this means simply that there are different types of mysticism and that some, perhaps most, types are conservative, while other types contribute to moral progress and social change, little objection can be taken to it. In some passages it might seem that this is all Bergson means to assert.⁶² But in general he goes further than this and maintains that the really central and essential character of mysticism is manifested only in the active type, while contemplative and ecstatic mysticism represents

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

undeveloped and distorted forms. This contention involves the whole problem of the nature of mysticism which must be postponed to the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to remark that Bergson does not base his view that mysticism is essentially active and morally dynamic, upon an empirical study of mystical experience in its various manifestations. Rather he selects one type of mysticism—the active, voluntaristic type especially as manifested in certain Christian saints—and maintains that this alone is true and complete mysticism. This procedure is clearly founded partly upon a value judgment as to the superior worth of this type of mysticism, and partly upon the consideration that this is what mysticism would be if Bergson's metaphysical system is true. This type of mysticism is obviously congruent with the doctrine of creative evolution and the vital impetus. Hence it is natural that the author of this philosophy should regard it both as exhibiting the essential nature of mysticism and as constituting a confirmation of his metaphysics. But it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the philosophy of the *élan vital* furnishes the criterion by which this kind of mysticism is regarded as the true and essential type.

It is noteworthy that Bergson is put to some difficulty to account for the active element in Christian mysticism. By tracing it to the Hebrew prophets he reveals a weakness in his theory, for he is compelled to admit that the prophets were not mystics in his

sense, and his assumption that Jesus was the most typical mystic would not be accepted by most critical students of either mysticism or the New Testament. Bergson is doubtless right in tracing the ethic of love and the doctrine that God is love to these sources, but this derivation casts doubt on the assumption that these factors in Christian mysticism are themselves mystical in origin and character.

It may in fact be plausibly maintained that these are non-mystical elements which have become incorporated into Christian mysticism through the authority of Christ and the Bible, and that it is precisely this fact which has given certain strains of Christian mysticism their active and ethical character. This contention will be supported further in the following chapter where it will be argued that mysticism is a complex phenomenon which takes various forms under different circumstances and does not exhibit a simple essence. The theory that mysticism is essentially dynamic and the source of universalistic or open morality must be rejected. Mysticism may be either static or dynamic, and the factors which determine which it shall be are extrinsic to mystical experience.

If mysticism is not to be identified with dynamic religion and open morality, and if non-mystical religion is not essentially static and the bulwark of closed morality, it is clear that Bergson's ambitious structure cannot stand. The difficulty here, as elsewhere in Bergson's philosophy, is that he does not

stop with empirical distinctions, but tends to hypostatize and absolutize them. Bergson himself does not maintain that all existing forms of religion and morality can be divided into two mutually exclusive classes, but he does hold that they are derived from two separate sources and therefore approximate one or the other of two distinct types. The pure types are more like Platonic Ideas than descriptive classifications, and it is freely admitted that actual morality and religion are mixed forms. Both morality and religion have sources in different aspects of man's psychical and biological nature, but they do not admit a dualism of the closed and the open, the static and the dynamic. Our insistence upon this point must accompany our acknowledgment of the extraordinary insight and artistry with which the *doyen* of living philosophers has illuminated the varied forms of moral and of religious experience.

Chapter IV

FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS IN THE THEORY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

WE HAVE now subjected to critical examination three of the most original and influential theories of religious experience. William James inaugurated the modern discussion of religious experience and explicitly formulated the widespread assumption that it is the creative source or originaive aspect of religion. His emphasis upon the *varieties* of religious experience was a radical challenge to all attempts to seek a foundation for religion in general in a supposedly uniform religious consciousness. But it also had the effect of supporting the tendency to find the meaning of religion in certain specific experiences or distinct types of experience regarded as preëminently religious.

Rudolf Otto contributed to the theory of religious experience a subtle introspective analysis of religious feeling and a useful terminology growing out of it. He showed that any theory of religious experience must take account of both its rational and non-rational factors and the complexities of their interrelations. His monism and apriorism, however, represent a reversion to the pre-Jamesian standpoint, and testify

to the predominance of apologetic over philosophical and psychological interests.

Bergson has emphasized that religious experience is rooted in the basic strivings of life, and that its imaginative, mystical, and other aspects are governed by its social setting. He recognizes the existence of fundamentally varied types of religious experience, but is led into an arbitrary and artificial classification by the vestiges of dualism in his metaphysics.

Our purpose in this concluding chapter will not be to develop a new theory of religious experience to be set alongside of these, but to discuss certain general characteristics of the modern emphasis upon religious experience as the basic factor in religion and certain fundamental problems as to the nature of religious experience.

The tendency to emphasize religious experience and to regard it as the fundamental and essential element in religion has commonly taken two distinct though interrelated forms. Probably the first of these in point of time as well as importance is the recognition that religion is something deeper than belief in certain theological propositions, allegiance to a code of ethics, or conformity to the practices of an institution. Hence an epoch in which the intellectual and cultic aspects of religion are paramount has often been followed by a period in which stress is laid upon inward piety and its fruits in conduct. Thus the era of religious controversy and formal orthodoxy

which followed the Reformation was succeeded by a development of pietism and mysticism both in Protestant and Catholic circles. Indeed the two tendencies may exist side by side within a given epoch. The eighteenth century, whose rationalism was manifested both in Deism and conventional orthodoxy, saw also the evangelical movement and the rise of Methodism. This motive was conspicuous in the waves of evangelical revivalism which periodically swept this country from the Great Awakening onward. We have observed that its influence was very strong in William James, and it may be detected in the writings of most of those who have laid stress upon the centrality of religious experience.

The appeal from belief to piety as the essence of religion does not necessarily mean that prevailing beliefs are rejected. The leaders of pietism had little interest in questioning the orthodox doctrines of their time, and the great Roman Catholic mystics were loyal to the dogmas of the Church. In circumstances of this kind religious experience tends to become standardized. Certain experiences or feelings come to be valued for their own sake, or as providing evidence of the depth and sincerity of the religious life. Thus Catholic theologians have developed an elaborate doctrine of the stages of the mystical life. A similar tendency toward standardization and the cultivation of certain experiences may be seen in various types of Hinduism and Buddhism and among the

Mohammedan Sufis. Perhaps the most familiar example, however, is found in the central position given to a certain type of conversion experience by evangelical Protestantism.

It is obvious that this process of standardization eventually defeats the aim of the original appeal to experience, and results in the very predominance of external over inward religion against which it was directed. In the long run, however, the tendency to find the essence of religion in religious experience is almost certain to result in the relaxation of dogma and the simplification of belief. Religious experiences are both less definite in outline and more varied in content than the beliefs with which they are associated. Hence when attention is directed from doctrine to experience the more precise features of the belief tend to be regarded as non-essential. This is the basis of the admitted tendency of mysticism to undermine orthodoxy, even where it appears to support it. These effects have followed inevitably even where they were least intended, as in pietism and evangelicalism.

A further stage is reached when the appeal to religious experience is motivated by a desire to simplify dogma and belief or to minimize their importance. This has been a characteristic motive and procedure of liberal theologians from the time of Schleiermacher to the present. The continuity of a religion is sought, not in its doctrines, rites, or institutions, but in religious experience, which is conceived to underlie them.

The familiar contrast between "abiding experiences" and "changing categories" is based upon this type of liberalism. It is assumed that certain experiences are more fundamental than doctrines, that the latter are interpretations of the former, and that the experiences remain essentially the same, while doctrinal interpretations vary from age to age. But these assumptions misconceive the complex relations between experience and belief. Beliefs may indeed be derived from experience, but on the other hand experiences are affected by antecedent beliefs. It cannot be assumed that if a type of experience is separated from the beliefs with which it has been associated, it will have sufficient fixity of structure to maintain itself unchanged. Rather as doctrines weaken and beliefs change, experiences also tend to become vague and variable. Those who have minimized the importance of theological beliefs in favor of specific experiences have in the long run tended to destroy both of them. It is, of course, true that experience in general is basic to knowledge, but this does not warrant the inference that any particular experience is prior to and independent of knowledge or belief. Therefore the emphasis upon religious experience as constituting the essence of vital religion is certain in the long run to transform any established religious system.

The second form of the appeal to religious experience is controlled by the purpose of theological apologetics. It is asserted that the real foundation of

religious belief is religious experience and that certain beliefs may be established by showing that they are based upon religious experience. This mode of approach to the emphasis upon religious experience may spring from a protest against authoritarianism, rationalism or skepticism. As Professor G. Dawes Hicks says, "When religious minds have discarded the ecclesiastical doctrines of the final authority of the Church and of the Thirty-nine Articles, and no longer rest their faith on the infallibility of the Scriptures or on a miraculous revelation in the past, it is natural for them to turn to individual experience and to find in it the ultimate basis of religious trust."¹ Religious experience is prized as yielding a certainty greater than can be attained in any other way, and therefore proof against the objections which are raised against religious beliefs on rational grounds. The contention that religious beliefs are founded upon religious experience may take a wide variety of forms, depending upon various combinations of psychological and epistemological theory. Some of these forms have been discussed in the foregoing chapters, while other types of argument and certain general considerations which are involved in all of them will be discussed later.

Whatever form it takes, the modern tendency to regard religious experience as the central aspect of religion is in harmony with, and has undoubtedly been

¹ G. Dawes Hicks, *The Philosophical Bases of Theism*, p. 89.

influenced by a number of deep-seated tendencies in modern thought. In the first place, it reflects the predominant anti-intellectualism of modern psychology. More and more the traditional doctrine that cognition is the basic mental function has been replaced by a view that it is in some sense secondary or derived. This may take the form simply of emphasizing the obvious fact that cognition takes place only within a wider context of experience upon which it is dependent, or there may be an attempt to subordinate it to some other distinct aspect of experience, such as feeling or conative activity. The connection of the movement which is the subject of our study with these psychological developments makes the problem of the psychological structure of religious experience of crucial importance.

Empiricism In the second place the emphasis upon religious experience has received a powerful impetus from the empirical movement in modern philosophy. As men came more and more to believe that all knowledge is derived from experience, it was natural to assume that religion is based upon religious experience. Strengthened by the wider conception of experience to which we have just referred, this view has seemed almost self-evident to many and to provide, moreover, a neat way of turning the tables on those who regarded empiricism as hostile to religion. Thus the conception of religious experience was taken as furnishing the basis for an empirical theology. This

interpretation of religious experience in terms of cognition raises the fundamental problem of the relation of religious experience to experience in general.

Finally, the assumption that religion has its center in personal states of consciousness is an expression of the individualism which has so profoundly characterized the modern mind. It could only arise in an epoch in which individual personality is regarded as the stable source of institutional and cultural patterns, and is bound to fade or take a radically different form when the individual is looked upon primarily as a product of the socio-cultural environment. The crucial issue here is whether beneath individual differences there is a general pattern of the religious consciousness, or whether variety is ultimate.

Our survey of the fundamental problems in the interpretation of religious experience may properly begin with its psychological aspects. What are the roots of religion in the soul? What are the principal psychological factors in religious experience and how are they related to each other? Is there a distinctive religious element or a typical structure which characterizes and constitutes the religious consciousness? These questions are fundamental, and so many theories have been put forth that it would be practically impossible to discuss them all. We shall confine ourselves to a rapid review of the chief types of theory which have been influential in the interpretation of religious experience.

We have seen that the emphasis upon religious experience as the source and essence of religion usually springs from a desire to get back of codes of conduct, theology, ritual, and institutional elements to the personal piety or religion of the heart which is believed to underlie them. Probably the majority of those who have taken this point of view would agree with Høffding's statement that "religious experience is essentially religious feeling."² Professor Hocking well describes the movement when he says: "The whole apparatus of reason in religion has retreated in importance, in favor of a more substantial basis—which we have agreed to call feeling."³ This emphasis upon feeling as the essential element in religious experience is due in large measure to the influence of Schleiermacher, who assigned it a central place in his *Addresses on Religion* and his *Christian Faith*. But more than the influence of any single individual, it is a product of the romantic movement in psychology which stressed feeling as the basic factor in all experience. The dependence of Schleiermacher, and of most writers who have stressed the centrality of feeling in religion, upon romantic psychology is well brought out by Professor John Baillie, who also tries to show the weakness of the entire movement by attacking the psychological assumptions upon which it rests.⁴ He

² Harald Høffding, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p. 102.

³ William Ernest Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. 37.

⁴ John Baillie, *The Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 202-234.

rightly points out the vagueness and ambiguity in the term feeling, and, following James Ward, distinguishes these meanings:

“(a) a touch, as feeling of roughness; (b) an organic sensation, as feeling of hunger; (c) an emotion, as feeling of anger; (d) *any* purely subjective state, as feeling of certainty or of activity; (e) the *one* subjective state that is purely ‘affective,’ as feeling of pleasure or pain.”

Baillie then continues: “The last-mentioned alone is feeling in the proper sense, as distinguished from cognition and conation, and it is obviously in this sense that the psychology which Schleiermacher is following *intends* to affirm that feeling is the one primary form of experience.”⁵

Now it is easy enough to show that if feeling be understood in any meaning as narrow as this, it is certainly not the basic factor in experience in general or in religious experience in particular. But those who have upheld the primordial character of feeling have thought of it not in any narrow sense, such as hedonic tone or bare sentience, but rather as undifferentiated conscious response. It is because Ward and Baillie take feeling in a narrow and specific sense that it is easy for them to show that it follows rather than precedes cognition in experience. But the case is far different if we understand feeling in a broader sense. If there is any truth in the conception of psychological evolution we must admit that cognitive

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

processes are a late product and derived from simpler and less highly differentiated forms of experience. The trouble with romantic psychology is not that it turned from cognition to feeling in its search for the basic type of mental process, but that it failed to recognize the full implications of the fact that both feeling and thinking take place in a context of biological activity. The psychology of today is neither intellectualistic nor romantic but biological and functional.

Nevertheless we must admit that the confused conceptions of feeling which are an outgrowth of romantic psychology have caused a great many misinterpretations of religious experience. Professor Hocking's statement quoted above indicates that feeling is a blanket term which conceals rather than clarifies the problem of the essential nature of religious experience. It is perfectly true, of course, that feeling as relatively undifferentiated mental response plays a considerable part in religious experience. Some indeed regard it as the essential feature of mysticism. We shall return later to the discussion of mystical factors in religious experience, but it is evident that this is by no means the only type of feeling which is involved in religious experience, for that experience cannot remain always at an undifferentiated level.

Those who have emphasized the place of feeling in religious experience have often meant such rela-

tively differentiated types of experience as (a) a kind of sensation or perception, (b) emotion, or (c) such relatively obscure ideas as hunches, presentiments and emotionally held convictions and intuitions. In none of these senses is feeling sharply distinguished from all cognitive processes, for there is an intellectual factor, an element of interpretation, in all of these modes of experience. Any of these types of feeling may be present in religious experience, but none of them is a unique and distinctive characteristic. Even sense perceptions play a part in the apprehension of religious objects by arousing emotions or by stimulating certain meanings or interpretations. It is sometimes held that religious experience depends upon a special sense by which the spiritual is directly apprehended, but it is hardly possible to maintain this view with any precise meaning or scientific justification. There is a flavor of the occult about such a conception which does not comport with its use in serious analysis. The notion that spiritual or religious entities are apprehended by means of a sixth sense, or faculty of met-empirical perception, is a relic of a debased conception of the spiritual as composed of some form of rarefied or ghostly extended substance. This hypothesis that religious experience is essentially a unique type of perception is sometimes resorted to for the interpretation of mysticism, and we shall return to this subject later.

The situation is a little different when we come to

the place of emotion in religious experience. No one would deny that many kinds of emotional response play a large part in religious experience, but there has been considerable difference of opinion on the question whether there are unique religious emotions. Some authorities have defended an affirmative answer to this question while others have derived religion from feelings of a more general character. It has been widely held, for example, that religion is derived from the emotion of fear, while Rudolf Otto, as we have seen, insists that religious fear is something altogether distinct from ordinary fear. Otto has probably presented the strongest case for the existence of distinctive religious emotions, but we have concluded that he has not proven the contention. It would seem probable in fact that the controversy can never be conclusively settled, because of the unreliable methods of introspective analysis upon which it depends. If one individual claims that two feelings or emotions are qualitatively distinct and irreducible while another maintains that one is related to or derived from the other, how can the controversy be settled? We cannot even be sure that both of these individuals are experiencing precisely the same emotions. This fact is sometimes taken as creating a presumption in favor of the first contention. We must admit, of course, that if two feelings or emotions can be distinguished by any individual, they are so far forth distinct. Feeling qualities, like sensory qualities, are unique and

in a sense irreducible, but they are obviously related to one another, and where this relationship is close it is possible that there may be continuity between them. Hence although anyone is perfectly free to maintain that religious awe or fear is different from ordinary fear, it is impossible to prove that one is not derived from or developed out of the other. It is always possible to maintain with William James that religious fear is simply the fear of a religious object, and one might add that with a certain conception of the religious object a new quality of feeling may emerge. We should note further that much theorizing with respect to this problem depends upon the assumption that complex mental states and processes are aggregates of simple elements, but it is much more probable that the felt quality of an experience is a unique resultant of its total configuration. If this is true, any list of primary emotions is no more than a rough and somewhat arbitrary classification, and cannot be sufficiently objective to provide a general answer to the question whether there is a distinctively religious emotion. Or one might put essentially the same fact in another way by saying that there are a great many distinctive religious emotions, but that since distinctiveness of emotional tone is a regular characteristic of emotional experiences the fact is of no practical or theoretical importance.

For ordinary and not strictly scientific purposes it is, of course, quite justifiable to speak of certain types

of emotion such as awe, wonder, reverence and the like as especially characteristic of religion. One should be careful to avoid the all too common oversimplifications, however, particularly those which are due to a failure to take account of the differences between religions. The feelings which are characteristic of the religion of some primitive tribe are quite different from those of a more advanced people. While it is possibly true that the feelings characteristic of different religions may resemble one another more closely than some other aspects, such as their theologies, it is a serious mistake to assume that they are the same even when they are called by the same name. Furthermore, within any developed religion there is manifested an enormous variety of emotional experiences. We cannot doubt, therefore, that those theories which profess to derive religious experience from a single or a small number of basic feelings or emotions are based upon an arbitrary selection of data.

Finally, the term feeling is sometimes loosely employed in the sense of intuition, presentiment, or emotionally founded conviction. Schleiermacher himself often used it in this way. In his later writings the term feeling (*Gefühl*) carried the same burden which in the first edition of his *Addresses on Religion* was borne by such expressions as feeling and intuition (*Gefühl und Anschauung*).^o Fries' *Ahnung*

^o John Baillie, *op. cit.*, pp. 210 ff. Cf. Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, pp. 233 ff.

is a good example of a "feeling" of this sort. Clearly such feelings as these involve thought processes or judgments, and the term feeling is justified only because of the obscure character of the intellectual factor or the strength of the affective element which accompanies it. At this level the distinction between religious feeling and religious thought has become transformed into a distinction between two modes of thinking. The effort to ground religion upon an aspect of experience deeper than thought has given way to the contention that religious experience makes use of a method of thinking different from the abstract or conceptual thinking of science and philosophy. This development is made inevitable by the presence of an apologetic interest. The appeal to feeling in religion thus often becomes in practice a claim to a special source of religious knowledge. Yet the strength of feeling which accompanies an intuition or presentiment is, of course, no evidence of the cognitive validity of the judgment involved. Like any other judgment, it must be submitted to whatever tests of verification are possible and appropriate in its field.

The contention that religious experience is marked by a mode of thinking distinct from the ordinary rational or conceptual sort is common to widely different types of interpreters. Perhaps the primary source for views of this nature is Hegel's distinction between the rational concepts (*Begriffe*) of science and phi-

losophy and the imaginative representations (*Vorstellungen*) employed by religion.⁷ Views of this general type have been maintained both by those who regard religious thought as fundamentally illusory and by those who look upon it as a source of deeper insight. Some emphasize the importance of myth in religion, or insist that religious beliefs must be interpreted symbolically; others point out similarities between religious insight and æsthetic judgment. Everett Dean Martin's contention that religious thinking rests primarily upon free association in contrast with the directed thinking of science, represents a new variation upon the same fundamental theme.⁸ All three of the thinkers whom we have treated at length engage in a polemic against the adequacy of abstract concepts in the sphere of religion, and urge the development and acceptance of ways of thinking which stay closer to the concrete richness of experience. Otto's "ideograms" and Bergson's "supple, mobile, and almost fluid representations, always ready to mould themselves on the fleeting forms of intuition," are attempts to realize this objective. There is obviously a considerable measure of truth in these contentions, but several critical remarks must be made. It is evident that religion makes use of all types of thinking, and there is none that is especially characteristic of religion as such, although certain forms of religion may

⁷ Cf. John Baillie, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-201.

⁸ Everett Dean Martin, *The Mystery of Religion*.

show a liking for particular modes of thinking, and some are doubtless more significant for religion than others. Moreover, all of these types of religious thinking are functions within experience; none of them is any more experiential than any other. Each is a product of a certain interest or combination of interests. The puzzles connected with any particular mode of religious thinking, for example the mythical, are due in large part to the fact that such thinking is under the control of several interests at the same time. It is precisely because of this that such thinking is more concrete than thinking which is controlled by a single interest. Any evaluation of these types of religious thinking can only be made in relation to the interests which they are meant to serve.

Hardly less numerous and influential than the theories which have regarded feeling as the essence of religious experience have been those which have stressed the centrality of volitional and active factors. Indeed the emphasis upon feeling in religious experience is partly due to the close relation between feeling and action.⁹ It is undoubtedly true that feeling is a more effective motivating force in conduct than thought. Every religious leader knows that the feelings must be moved if the springs of action are to be released. While this view seems to place feeling at the center of experience, since it regards it as the

⁹ Cf. W. E. Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, pp. 64 ff.

originating factor, it may also be observed that it values feeling simply as a means to activity. We may observe that this conception of the relation between feeling and action may be associated with either a narrow or a wide conception of experience. If religious experience is understood primarily as the inner consciousness which precedes or accompanies action, then it is obvious that feeling retains the central place in experience. Undoubtedly, many of those who have stressed the dominance of feeling in religious experience have done so because they conceived of experience in this restricted sense, but there is of course no genuine warrant for thus excluding action from the area of experience. If experience be conceived in the wider sense which includes action the rôle of feeling is reduced; it tends to become a mere preliminary or accompaniment of action, while the latter tends to be regarded as the essential factor of experience. Before we go further in our consideration of those theories which stress the volitional and active factors in religious experience, however, we must note that feeling does not always sustain a positive relation to action. Not infrequently it is a substitute rather than a motive for overt behavior. It is, in fact, characteristic of a certain type of pietism to inhibit the expression of religion in action, except in certain conventional ways, and to regard the life of inner feeling as something to be cultivated and enjoyed. No comprehensive understanding of the rôle of feeling

in religious experience can overlook the compensatory character of much religious emotion.

The problem of the place of volitional factors in religious experience is very similar to that of the place of feeling. No one would question that religious experience contains and is influenced by a wide variety of these factors. The problem of whether there is a specifically religious volitional factor is also similar to the problem of whether there is a specifically religious feeling. It has generally taken the form of asking whether there is a special religious instinct. Here again the problem depends in part upon the definition of terms and in part upon rather dubious and unreliable methods of introspective analysis. Even in the heyday of instinct psychology, the term religious instinct was more a feature of popular than of scientific thinking. It was employed by such authorities as E. D. Starbuck and Morris Jastrow, however, and W. P. Paterson in his Gifford Lectures defended the view that there is a religious instinct on the basis of McDougall's careful but somewhat antiquated definition of instinct.¹⁰ The standard argument for a religious instinct was the fact of the universality of religion. Since wherever human beings are found they are always religious in some sense, it was felt that there must be a religious instinct. But though the universality of religion does indicate that religion is securely rooted in the volitional nature of

¹⁰ W. P. Paterson, *The Nature of Religion*, pp. 98-110.

man, it does not follow that there is a specifically religious instinct, and the immense variety of religious manifestations stands in the way of such a conception.

A number of attempts have been made to show that religion has its origin in some particular instinct or drive. Religion has been derived from the sex instinct, the instinct of gregariousness, and doubtless others. The highly specialized character of theories of this sort is itself an indication that they represent decided over-simplifications of the problem. One cannot doubt that the basic instincts or drives play important rôles in various aspects and types of religious experience, as in all experience, but they cannot account for the special characteristics of religion.

The volitional or conative factors which underlie religious experience may operate either consciously or unconsciously. Professor A. E. Haydon,¹¹ for example, regards religion as rooted in both conscious and unconscious human desires for the various goods of life. This approach leads to an extremely broad conception of religion as the quest for the good life, and tends to obliterate any distinction between religion and such particular aspects of man's quest for values as ethical striving or economic effort. It would scarcely be possible to overestimate the part that desires play in the religious life. We may note the influence not only of desires for specific goods but also more general desires for such things as help in the

¹¹ A. E. Haydon, *Man's Search for the Good Life*.

attainment of goods, security, significant status, preservation, cosmic companionship and support. A comprehensive treatment of the influence of desires upon religious experience would have to include a lengthy discussion of the interaction of these and similar factors. We must not, of course, fall into the mistake of assuming that these desires are innate or fixed and invariable. Rooted as they are in the biological and psychological nature of man, they are also profoundly modified by environmental and cultural influences.

There has been an increasing disposition to recognize that factors similar to those which operate consciously may also operate beneath the surface of consciousness. Although it is obvious that the admission of influences of this sort may open the door to unverifiable speculations, the hypothesis of unconscious volitional determinants of conscious experience is too useful to be dismissed, and if cautiously employed may contribute a great deal to the understanding of religion. Religious ideas which apparently rest upon rational grounds or upon the basis of conscious experience, may actually be primarily the product of conative factors acting unconsciously. It is not difficult, for example, to see the influence of such factors upon various conceptions of God and of immortality. An unconscious desire for the security and utter dependence of childhood influences the thought of God as father. Religion has also been used as a means of compensating for inferiority feelings, and as a means

name for the religious attitude is faith, provided that it is understood that faith is not a kind of knowledge but acknowledgment of an ideal end as having "rightful claim over our desires and purposes." "Such acknowledgment," Dewey writes, "is practical, not primarily intellectual. It goes beyond evidence that can be presented to *any* possible observer."¹⁸ The authority of the object of religious faith is based on "the intrinsic nature of the ideal," not upon a belief that it is already actual and must surely prevail. Dewey is opposed to any attempt to buttress the authority of the ideal by showing it to be embedded in antecedent reality, and declares that this shows a lack of moral faith. We may remark that this is true only if it is thought that thereby this authority of the ideal object is increased. Dewey himself is well aware that although imagination is involved in the apprehension of ideal ends, they are not mere projections of desires, but are related, both in their natures and in the possibilities of their realization, to the nature of things. We may agree also with Dewey's concern lest preoccupation with the character of this relation should divert energy from the attempt to realize the ideal. But it is also evident from Dewey's own polemic against "idealism" and "supernaturalism," that he believes an inadequate conception of the object of religious faith will lessen its practical

rather than fixed entities. And while the religion of any one individual or cohesive group may involve a particular type of religious sentiment, it can hardly be maintained that there is a single religious sentiment common to all varieties of religious experience.

A similar approach is represented by those who find religion to be primarily an attitude. A. S. Woodburne, for example, defines an attitude as "a mental and motor tendency toward a certain type of activity . . . a set of the psycho-physical organism," and declares: "The religious attitude is differentiated in human experience as the social attitude towards the extra-human environment."¹⁷ John Dewey also lends the weight of his authority to this approach, although he holds a very different view of the nature of the attitude in question. He warns against the common assumption that there is such a thing as religion in general, and maintains that religions are alike only in their common espousal of a certain attitude or quality of experience. Religious experience must not be conceived as a specific kind of experience providing evidence for the reality of specific objects, for the interpretations given to such experiences are not integral to them but come from the environing culture. The religious factor in experience must be distinguished by its function or effect, which Dewey asserts to be the total adjustment or unification of the self produced by devotion to an inclusive ideal. The best

¹⁷ A. S. Woodburne, *The Religious Attitude*, pp. 75, 341.

made between religious and non-religious experience. It will be objected that as a matter of fact we do make such a distinction and regard certain experiences as having especial religious significance and value. This, of course, is perfectly true; the point is, however, that the distinction and the types of experience chosen are relative to a particular pattern of religion and culture. Within any given culture people learn to find particular religious meanings in certain types of experience, while in another culture these experiences might not be regarded as religious at all or might have a very different religious significance.

The pluralistic nature of religious experience implies also that no general answer can be given to the problem of the cognitive value or authority of religious experience. This question can be significantly raised only when the type of religious experience is specified. It is equally meaningless either to claim cognitive status for religious experience in general or to deny it. All experience is reaction to environment and involves a way of construing the environment. Experiences which are accounted of religious significance contain interpretations and valuations which have a right to be taken into consideration in the formulation of a philosophy which aims to do justice to experience as a whole. But no isolated experience yields conclusive evidence of its own meaning. The meaning of any experience, and thus of any religious

sition in Hebrew-Christian prophetic religion. But distinctly different attitudes have been characteristic of other strains in the Western religious tradition, and when we turn to other cultures we meet, not only the religious attitudes with which we are directly familiar but others which to us may seem strange or even irreligious. Hence we come back to a reiteration of William James's emphasis upon the varieties of religious experience. There is neither a special psychical element nor a particular structure of experience which is uniquely and universally characteristic of religious experience. We have learned to think of religious beliefs in the plural; we must also learn to speak in this way of religious feelings, sentiments and attitudes. In employing such terms as these, and also such expressions as the religious consciousness, we must be careful that our terminology does not covertly introduce a procedure which begs the underlying question.

The provisional adoption of pluralism in our theory of religious experience does not mean that certain specific "experiences" are to be singled out as preëminently religious. On the contrary, that widely prevalent notion of religious experience rests at bottom upon the assumption that certain experiences are inherently religious because of the presence in them of a specific element, quality, or structure. The pluralistic hypothesis has precisely the opposite effect; it denies that any experiences are necessarily and inherently religious or that any *general* distinction can be

made between religious and non-religious experience. It will be objected that as a matter of fact we do make such a distinction and regard certain experiences as having especial religious significance and value. This, of course, is perfectly true; the point is, however, that the distinction and the types of experience chosen are relative to a particular pattern of religion and culture. Within any given culture people learn to find particular religious meanings in certain types of experience, while in another culture these experiences might not be regarded as religious at all or might have a very different religious significance.

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preted in connection with the rest of experience. The interpretation of religious experience, therefore, is not a matter of reading off meanings from particular experiences but of working out an interpretation of experience generally which will take account of these experiences. It must be remembered, furthermore, that interpretations which seems to come from the experience itself may in reality have been furnished as a framework of the experience from outside it. It is misleading to think of an interpretation simply as "growing out of" an experience, for our categories and established modes of reaction are present before any particular experience, and condition the form which the experience itself takes. The relation of experience and interpretation is reciprocal and complex rather than being a simple one-way relation of dependence. There is, therefore, no justification for appealing to religious experience as the final authority in religion, save in the general sense that any religious belief or attitude must in the long run be tested by its fidelity to human experience in general.¹⁹

If we adopt the view that religious experience exists in varieties which manifest no single essence or general structure, then the question is raised whether there can be a classification into basic types. It would be rash to maintain that this problem presents insuperable difficulties, but it is evident that they are very

¹⁹ Cf. E. E. Aubrey, "The Authority of Religious Experience Re-examined." *Journal of Religion*, 13:433-449, (1933).

great indeed. We cannot expect a formal classification which takes account of all the varied empirical characteristics and is based upon a principle which insures that the classes are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Because of the very complexity of the problem such a principle can hardly be forthcoming. Any principle of classification which is employed will introduce a particular perspective and reflect a partial interest. Therefore, we must content ourselves with classifications which are provisional and instrumental rather than exhaustive and final.

It would seem almost a truism to say that one extremely important classification would be based on the differences between the historic religions. And yet the fact is that this obvious point is often overlooked, and religious experience is discussed as if it took place on a common level underlying the differences between the great religions. This is but an example of the tendency to talk of religion in the abstract where it actually exists only in particular forms. And it would be hard to overestimate the importance of the differences between Christian religious experience, for example, and Buddhist religious experience. Each of the great religious traditions possesses a unique *ethos* which imparts a characteristic tone, a disposition toward certain feelings, valuations, and attitudes, to religious experience within the range of its influence. And yet, important as these differences are, they are scarcely

more significant than the variations between sects and movements within the great religions, all of which are based upon and produce characteristic forms of religious experience. Moreover, these movements are continually changing, so that time makes great differences in the prevailing patterns of experience. These differences, further, are cut across and rendered more complex by variations based upon psychological and cultural factors. In consequence we have correspondences and "convergences of types," as Otto calls them, which manifest interesting and instructive similarities and differences.²⁰

We cannot undertake to discuss all of the classifications of types of religious experience which have been proposed or actually employed. Bergson's important distinction between static and dynamic religion is valuable; it obviously has a wider application than he gives it, and can usefully be employed apart from his underlying presuppositions. We have also discussed James's influential distinction of the religion of the once-born and twice-born types, the healthy-minded and the sick souls. We have suggested certain distinctions based on the predominance of various psychological processes. If it were possible to arrive at a generally acceptable classification of psychological types, such as Jung has attempted, it would doubtless be valuable and illuminating when applied to religious experience. But

²⁰ Rudolf Otto, *Religious Essays*, chap. X.

such general problems have had to be excluded from the scope of the present study. We shall confine ourselves to a discussion of one very important problem in this connection, that of the place of mysticism in religious experience.

Can religious experience be divided into mystical and non-mystical types, or is all religious experience mystical in some degree? The answer to this question will depend in large part upon the definitions given to the two terms. A broad and inclusive conception of mysticism, combined with the Jamesian idea of religious experience as the creative or first-hand aspect of religion, makes it possible to identify religious experience and mysticism, or at least to say as James says that "personal religious experience has its root and center in mystical states of consciousness . . ." ²¹ If, however, the Jamesian conception of religious experience is abandoned and the term be used in the neutral and inclusive sense, then it is obvious that mysticism even in its widest meaning is only a part of religious experience. We believe that the latter conception has more justification than the former, but the more precise determination of the relationship will depend upon the meaning which is assigned to mysticism.

Few terms in the English language have been used in more different senses than this one. In popular usage mysticism is employed, with either eulogistic

²¹ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 379.

or depreciatory valuation, to signify the marvelous, weird, or supernatural. The more precise uses of the term fall into two fairly distinct classes: (1) mysticism is used in the sense of the German *Mysticismus* to refer to a type of theory or philosophy, and (2) it is also employed in the sense of *Mystik* to designate a type of experience which underlies or is conditioned by the mystical philosophies. Professor E. S. Ames has argued for this distinction between the mystical experience and the mystical doctrine. The first "is a fact of the emotional life, an experience of rapport, of seeming illumination and peace," while the second "is the theory that this state of rapport is an experience of ultimate reality, of God."²² This distinction is somewhat oversimplified both as to the two aspects of mysticism and as to the relation between them. At least three types of philosophical theory have been called mystical. The first of these is the conception that behind the world of sense or beyond the categories of space and time there is some noumenal or transcendental reality inaccessible to ordinary experience but nevertheless existent and in fact the ultimate reality. Rignano, for example, writes, ". . . any act of mysticism does just consist in admitting the existence of something mysterious which is not capable either of coming under the observation of any of our senses or of being imagined

²² *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy*, p. 115.

philosophy, but it has been influential also in many ways in the West, particularly through the influence of Neoplatonism.

These types of mystical theory are capable of almost infinite variations and combinations, and they have not only had a widespread influence upon the formation of avowedly mystical philosophies, but they have left their traces upon philosophical systems which are basically non-mystical. However we must insist, on the one hand, that mysticism as a historical phenomenon is primarily not a theory but a type of practice or experience, and on the other, that the relation between mystical experience and the mystical philosophies must not be conceived too simply. The view that mystical philosophies have arisen out of mystical experience, or that they are interpretations of mystical experience, does not do justice to the facts. It is an example of the assumption of a one-sided relation between experience and theory which we have already seen to be inadequate in other connections. It rests upon the unjustifiable assumption that by stripping off successive layers of interpretation one can finally come to pure experience. There is no experience, mystical or non-mystical (except unconscious trance) so "pure" that it is not conditioned by prior experience and that it does not contain structural or interpretative factors. The fundamental ideas and valuations which the mystic has received from his cultural environment enter into and determine the char-

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²² *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy*, p. 115.

by means of sensible elements combined together in any fashion whatever.”²³ The prime historical example of this type of philosophy is Neoplatonism, which has had an incalculable influence upon mysticism. It would be better to designate this theory as transcendentalism if that term had not also become infected by vagueness and ambiguity.

The second type of mystical philosophy is the assertion of a supernormal faculty of perception or cognition. Warren’s *Dictionary of Psychology*, for example, defines mysticism as “the doctrine that ultimate reality is revealed through a special mode of knowledge, which is distinct from perceptual and ideational cognition and is superior to them.”²⁴ This theory has had a long and varied history. Its origins are lost in primitive conceptions of trance and revelation, but in its philosophical forms it bears the impress of Plato’s conception of *nous*, of Aristotle’s theory of the active intellect, and of the Stoic *logos spermatikos*. It attained its most typical mystical form in the medieval conceptions of the spark or *synteresis*, the *apex mentis* or uncreated ground of the soul.

The third type of mystical philosophy is the doctrine that the mind or soul of man in its essential nature is identical with, or at least akin to, ultimate reality. If natural objects are conceived as parts or

²³ E. Rignano, *The Psychology of Reasoning*, p. 185.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

modes of the real, the theory leads to naturalistic pantheism or monism. This perhaps is not usually regarded as a mystical philosophy, and indeed has often been thought to rest upon a hard-headed rationalism or empiricism; but its chief exponent, Spinoza, can hardly be denied the title of mystic, and the identification of man with nature has produced an impressive line of mystics. On the other hand, if the soul is identified with a transcendental reality, the logical outcome is acosmic pantheism. The reality of the phenomenal world is denied and ordinary experience is condemned as illusory. Friedrich Heiler defines mysticism in this sense: "Mysticism is that form of intercourse with God in which the world and self are absolutely denied, in which human personality is dissolved, disappears and is absorbed in the infinite unity of the Godhead."²⁵ John Oman holds the same conception: "The essential marks of this mysticism are, first, its attitude toward the Natural, as in no form a manifestation of the Supernatural, but a mere confusing manifold, the illusory evanescent; and second, its attitude towards the empirical personality as the source of the unreal. It is the mysticism for which the task of religion is to rid ourselves of the Natural, both as the world and as concrete personality."²⁶ This type of mysticism finds its clearest and most extreme expression in the *advaita* doctrine of Hindu

²⁵ Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer*, p. 136.

²⁶ John Oman, *The Natural and the Supernatural*, p. 411.

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These types of mystical theory are capable of almost infinite variations and combinations, and they have not only had a widespread influence upon the formation of avowedly mystical philosophies, but they have left their traces upon philosophical systems which are basically non-mystical. However we must insist, on the one hand, that mysticism as a historical phenomenon is primarily not a theory but a type of practice or experience, and on the other, that the relation between mystical experience and the mystical philosophies must not be conceived too simply. The view that mystical philosophies have arisen out of mystical experience, or that they are interpretations of mystical experience, does not do justice to the facts. It is an example of the assumption of a one-sided relation between experience and theory which we have already seen to be inadequate in other connections. It rests upon the unjustifiable assumption that by stripping off successive layers of interpretation one can finally come to pure experience. There is no experience, mystical or non-mystical (except unconscious trance) so "pure" that it is not conditioned by prior experience and that it does not contain structural or interpretative factors. The fundamental ideas and valuations which the mystic has received from his cultural environment enter into and determine the char-

acter of his mystical experience. This does not mean, of course, that mystical experience is simply the product of a philosophy. Rather the relationship between theory and experience is a mutual and reciprocal relation. The philosophy conditions the experience, and the experience in turn may serve to modify the philosophy. This fact helps to account for the great difficulty of defining mystical experience without bringing into the definition certain elements of theory or interpretation; for while mystical experience can occur without any *particular* philosophical background, it never occurs without some structure or context which tends to fix its meaning and determine its interpretation. Hence the definitions of mystical experience are usually somewhat too narrow, even though an attempt may be made to indicate that the experience is not necessarily bound up with the particular ideas which figure in the definition.

Professor Leuba makes this attempt when he says that the term mystical "will mean for us any experience taken by the experiencer to be a contact (not through the senses, but 'immediate,' 'intuitive') or union of the self with a larger-than-self, be it called the World-Spirit, God, the Absolute, or otherwise."²⁷ This definition recognizes the presence in, or supervening upon, the experience of an impression of immediate or intuitive contact or union as the essential factor, and it indicates that mystical experience is not

²⁷ J. H. Leuba, *Psychology of Religious Mysticism*, p. 1.

dependent upon a particular conception of the larger-than-self with which this contact or union is made. Professor E. S. Ames's definition quoted above emphasizes also the sense of rapport which is said to be "a fact of the emotional life." William James made a more ambitious attempt to designate the psychological criteria by which mystical experience may be marked off from non-mystical experience. Mystical experience, he maintained, is characterized by two principal marks, ineffability and noetic quality, and two somewhat less important characteristics, passivity and transiency.²⁸ We may remark that these four characteristics, particularly if they are interpreted as loosely as James interpreted them, extend the boundaries of mystical experience very widely. We do not object, of course, to James's extension of the meaning of mysticism beyond the sphere of religion, for there certainly exist both mystical experiences and mystical ideas which have little or nothing to do with religion. But James extends the meaning of the term unduly when he speaks of a sense of deeper meaning in a maxim or formula as exhibiting a rudiment of mysticism.²⁹ The fact is that much experience which no one would call mystical is marked by these four traits which James declares are characteristic of mystical experience.

Some have thought to avoid the difficulty of assign-

²⁸ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 380-381.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

ing psychological characteristics which will carefully mark off the boundaries between mystical and non-mystical experience, by attempting to define mysticism in terms of unmistakable cases. This approach, however, runs at once into a grave difficulty. What cases are to be selected as typical examples of fully developed mystical states? We should agree at once that obviously pathological cases should not be selected for this purpose. For if the object is to determine the nature of normal mysticism, the inquiry will be distorted if a beginning is made with the abnormal. This is by no means to assert that a sharp line can be drawn between the normal and the abnormal, and that the latter may not in certain respects throw light upon the former. But it is necessary to insist that the laws of proportion be observed and due weight be given to the normal.

We should admit that a great deal of mysticism, particularly of the more extreme sort, has pathological accompaniments or even characteristics; but if our subject is mysticism, and particularly if our subject is religious mysticism, these should not occupy the center of the stage. We should not regard these pathological traits as determining the essential nature of mysticism. Mental dissociation is doubtless present to a greater or less degree in many cases of mystical experience, but as Charles A. Bennett says, the significant thing about the great mystics is their effort to overcome disintegration and achieve unity. Bennett

has convincingly shown that all theories which stress the passive and morbid characteristics of the mystics' experience and treat them as the victims of psychological or physical conditions beyond their control, are inadequate precisely because of their failure to grasp the central importance of the mystics' efforts to organize and interpret their experiences.³⁰ Bennett offers as examples of theories which fall into this error the view of Murisier that the mystic is one who has been a victim of the tensions of life and seeks a way out by the way of oversimplification and substitution, and the attempts of Godfernaux and Santayana to explain mystical experience as the result of some bodily or instinctive rhythm. Ribot's view that mystical experience is a simplification of mental life to the point of monoideism, and Leuba's even more extreme reduction of it to unconscious trance, are examples of the same mistaken emphasis. Some of these features may be present in or may underlie the experience of certain mystics, but they cannot be regarded as furnishing the key to the interpretation of all mystical experience.

Leuba has maintained that at the crucial moment of mystical experience the mystic lapses into unconscious trance, and that upon returning to consciousness he identifies this void with the Absolute, God, or Nirvana, under the influence of his metaphysical

³⁰ Charles A. Bennett, *A Philosophical Study of Mysticism*, chap. 1. See also pp. 39-42.

theories.²¹ However, there is a good deal of doubt whether the mystical trance usually involves a lapse into unconsciousness. As Bennett says, this is still an open question for empirical psychology, and probably a question which cannot be settled conclusively because of the conflicting and ambiguous testimony of the mystics themselves. Over against the statements of the mystics who report a lapse into unconsciousness, must be set those which stress the emotional and noetic quality of the experience. And Bennett suggests that those who report total unconsciousness may be distorting their experience under the influence of the mystical tradition that God is to be sought by the negative path.

Under the influence of James and Delacroix, who are certainly among the best of the psychologists of mysticism, there has been a tendency to explain mystical experience as due to incursions into consciousness from the subconscious. It may be thought, however, that the resort to explanation in terms of the subconscious is one of the weaker parts of James's psychology, and that this mode of approach represents an attempt to explain the obscure by the almost totally dark.

One of the most plausible of recent theories of the basic psychological processes involved in religious experience of the mystical type is that of J. C. Flower,

²¹ J. H. Leuba, "Les Tendances Religieuses chez les Mystiques Chrétiens," *Revue Philosophique*, 54: 441-87, (1902).

who contends that religious behavior is the outcome of the inadequacy of our specific response tendencies. They can yield only a "partial adaptation . . . which still leaves a state of unstable equilibrium." In consequence, religious experience from one point of view is a "frustration experience, which provides the nucleus for all the fantasy and imaginative formations of religious belief."³² But the same experience is also a "response to beyondness," for the very experience of frustration and inadequacy may be construed as an inchoate apprehension of something in the environment which eludes our specific responses. This furnishes the basis of Flower's definition: "We may, then, tentatively regard religion as being essentially an attitude determined by the discrimination of an element of 'utterly-beyondness,' brought about by a mental development which is able to appreciate the existence of more in the world than that to which existing endowment effects adequate adjustment."³³

Professor H. N. Wieman adopts a similar theory of mysticism. In his view the mystic experience occurs in subjects of a favorable psychical constitution when something interferes with the individual's ordinary habits of response to the environment. Then one no longer reacts to habitually selected data but "becomes aware of a far larger portion of that totality of imme-

³² J. C. Flower, *An Approach to the Psychology of Religion*, p. 23 ff.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

diates experience which constantly flows over one.”³⁴ The experience is also described as a “state of diffusive awareness, where habitual systems of response are resolved into an undirected, unselective aliveness of the total organism to the total event then ensuing. . . .”³⁵ The experience involves temporary dissolution of meanings, but it has positive value in that it may help one to develop new meanings and values in life or to reinterpret the old. On this view mystical experience is not necessarily religious, but becomes so only when through it the individual finds meanings which contribute to the religious quest for the apprehension and attainment of the highest values. If religious experience be defined as “awareness of the realm of unattained possibility,” mystic experience may be regarded as one of its varieties.³⁶

This approach to the psychological explanation of mystical and religious experience is fundamentally similar to that of James and Delacroix, but has the merit of avoiding the metaphors and fictitious entities which are involved in conceptions such as a lowering of the threshold or an upsurge from the subconscious. It may therefore be regarded as providing the most satisfactory available explanation of the psychological

³⁴ H. N. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method*, p. 38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁶ Cf. H. N. Wieman, *The Wrestle of Religion with Truth*, pp. 135, 154. Also, H. N. Wieman, *Methods of Private Religious Living*, chap. IX.

mechanisms underlying the phenomena of mystical experience.

It must be remembered, however, that any causal explanation of mystical experience, even when it undoubtedly fastens upon fundamental characteristics, is likely to be partial and somewhat misleading. It should, therefore, at least in the present state of psychology, be subordinated to the somewhat simpler problem of description. Nevertheless, the theoretical writers on mysticism differ widely as to the aspect of mental life which is central in mystical experience. There are many who regard mysticism as primarily an emotional phenomenon, others give an account of it in terms of various cognitive processes, still others stress its volitional aspects, while many construe the mystical experience in terms which do not permit this traditional division of mental life. These theories are basically determined by the predilections of various psychologists in favor of one or another aspect of mental life as fundamental, and are buttressed by an unconscious selection among the mystics of those whose experience illustrates the predominance of the faculty which is regarded as basic. The fact that there is so much variety among the experiences of the mystics makes it very easy to make such a selection without the fact being particularly obvious.

We have seen that E. S. Ames regards mystical experience as a "fact of the emotional life, an experience of rapport, of seeming illumination and peace." Bert-

rand Russell goes so far as to say that "Mysticism is, in essence, little more than a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe."³⁷ This definition is obviously too broad, and would include much that is not significantly mystical at all. It is noteworthy that both of these definitions recognize the presence of an intellectual factor in mystical experience, although they regard the emotion as that which is specifically characteristic of mysticism.

It is, of course, true that emotion is prominent in a great deal of mystical experience, especially among certain types of mystics such as the Hindu Baktis and many Roman Catholic female mystics. But it is doubtful whether mysticism can be defined as primarily an emotional phenomenon unless one is prepared to maintain either that there is a certain particular mystical emotion (or pattern of emotions) or that emotion becomes mystical when it attains a certain intensity. Neither of these alternatives appears to be defensible and, hence, we may conclude that emotion in itself is not the fundamental characteristic of mysticism.

The significance of mysticism has traditionally been regarded as primarily cognitive. This is shown by the prevalence of the term intuition to designate the central feature of mystical experience. The idea is frequently present, moreover, even when different

³⁷ Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*, p. 3.

terms are used. E. Boutroux, for example, says: "Mysticism consists . . . in seeing with the eyes of the soul . . . It manifests itself most essentially in what is called ecstasy, a state in which, all communication with the outer world being broken, the soul feels herself in communication with an internal object which is the infinite being, God."³⁸ We have already noticed the unfortunate ambiguities with which the term intuition is infected. In consequence there are many theories of the nature of mystical intuition. A good many of the more popular writers on mysticism have regarded it as a quasi-perceptual faculty—a sense for the unseen or supernatural. Miss Underhill, whose earlier writings maintained this point of view, has called it the "instinct for transcendence."³⁹ A good many expressions could be quoted from the mystics themselves showing that they construed their experience as a spiritual or supernormal perception. Augustine spoke of the mystical eye of the soul, and Al Ghazzali said that the mystical vision is "like an immediate perception, as if one touched its object with one's hand."⁴⁰ Rudolf Otto's criticism of this "illuminationism" is very incisive:

"The illuminist is the 'miracle-man' who receives magical insight, special revelations and heavenly visions through supernatural powers. He is an empiricist and a hyperphysical

³⁸ Emile Boutroux, "The Psychology of Mysticism." *International Journal of Ethics*, 18:183, (1908).

³⁹ Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way*, chap. I.

⁴⁰ Quoted by Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 59.

sensualist in so far as he experiences objects of a supersensual but still empirical sphere by means of a sixth sense. One is here trapped in the antithesis between the supernatural and that which is contained within the natural conceived as two levels of existence. And this is a kind of physical antithesis, where powers, conditions and experiences are classified according to the physical and hyperphysical. The real intuitus mysticus however is beyond this contrast. For it knows one kind of reality only, veiled by sense experience, and not two spheres miraculously intermingling."⁴¹

We have seen that there is some trace of this point of view in Bergson's thought, and it can hardly be denied that Bergson's instinct theory of intuition has influenced a good many people to look upon mystical experience in this way. This theory necessarily involves strong elements of the supernatural or the occult, however much its upholders may try to minimize these features. In the interpretation of historical mysticism it leads to too much stress upon visions, revelations, and acquaintance with supernormal "realities." There is no question but that a good deal of historical mysticism has been of this sort, but it is doubtful that a very high valuation can be placed upon it from the standpoint of truth or of ethical consequences. This kind of mysticism can be explained quite satisfactorily as a product of dissociation resulting in excessive suggestibility and hallucinatory imagination.

The most careful recent defense of the ancient the-

⁴¹ Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, p. 70.

ory that the culminating point of mystical experience is a purely intellectual intuition of God, is found in the writings of Joseph Maréchal. According to Maréchal, sensible and imaginative visions are intermediate states between ordinary experience and mystical ecstasy, and there is nothing to distinguish these states from the hallucinations and pseudo-hallucinations of non-mystics. They are simply projected and localized images, more or less general and vague. The true mystic state, however, "is neither a sense perception nor an imaginative projection nor a discursive knowledge, but, strictly speaking, an *intellectual intuition*, one of those intuitions whose exact type we do not in our ordinary experience possess."⁴² Maréchal's conception is grounded upon a scholastic psychology which recognizes a hierarchy of mental faculties culminating in the pure reason or intuitive intellect. It is supported by reports of the experiences of certain of the mystics which Maréchal interprets as authentic cases of intellectual intuition. The much larger number of reports of mystical experience which do not conform to this theory because of the presence in them of sensible, imaginal, conceptual, or spatial and temporal factors, are disposed of by assigning them to preliminary stages in the mystic way. Maréchal is not disturbed by the fact that most modern psychologists are unwilling to admit the possibility of purely intellectual intuition, but his confidence in its possibility can hardly be

⁴² J. Maréchal, *Studies in the Psychology of Mysticism*, p. 121.

shared by those who are unable to accept his metaphysical psychology. With respect to the evidence he adduces from the mystics, the situation is similar to that presented by Leuba's theory of unconscious trance. In the first place, Maréchal accepts as authentic examples of intellectual intuition a good many cases which other students would find doubtful, and in the second place, it is possible, at least, that the mystics who have claimed to have risen above all spatial, temporal, and conceptual elements in experience and to have obtained a pure intuition, have done so because they have been under the influence of the same philosophical tradition which lies back of Maréchal's own thought.

Charles A. Bennett presents a more satisfactory view of mystical intuition. He maintains that knowledge depends upon two mutually supplementary processes which, following H. Sturt, he designates as part-working and total-working. Part-working refers to the ordinary discursive analytical operations of the mind. Total-working involves the following characteristics:

"(1) In it the mind apprehends the whole. It is synoptic. It is intuitive, not analytic; noetic, not discursive. It is not a process of attaching predicates to a subject but it is a knowledge of the subject of predicates. (2) The knowledge it confers is inarticulate in the sense that it cannot readily be translated into conceptual terms. (3) Yet this knowledge is destined to become articulate, for although total-working

and part-working are distinguishable they are not incompatible. Each needs the other to correct and complete it. (4) Even when inarticulate it is positive, for it is the fruitful source of negations and exclusions."⁴³

Mystical intuition occurs when the total-working phase of the mental process is predominant. Bennett warns that it should not be confused with perceptual intuition of a complex system of terms and relations in which the situation is seen as an integrated whole of parts, nor with the post-analytical intuition by which one grasps a mathematical demonstration as a whole. "The intuition I have in mind," Bennett writes, "the essentially mystical intuition, differs from both the preceding. It is the experience in which the solving idea 'dawns on' one, in which one discerns the clue, in which one recovers the forgotten subject of one's predicates."⁴⁴ Far from making any claims to infallibility for this type of intuition, Bennett contends that it has to be established, and that this can only be done through making connections with and reworking one's existing system of ideas. Bennett concludes that the mystics are therefore justified in claiming that their experience is noetic, but not in postulating a special faculty of mystical knowledge. On this view, however, there is a mystical element in all growth of knowledge and understanding.

Delacroix's definition of mystical intuition is

⁴³ Charles A. Bennett, *A Philosophical Study of Mysticism*, pp. 97-98.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

worked out along the same lines and has the further merit of showing that the more extreme cases of ecstasy can be interpreted in these terms. He maintains that high contemplation differs from ordinary contemplation simply in the intensity of the experience. There is no complete loss of consciousness and no absolute suppression of multiplicity, that is of imaginal and conceptual factors. Thus the mystical ecstasy is interpreted as a highly concentrated and intense æsthetic intuition.⁴⁵

Traditionally the volitional elements in the mystical experience have been subordinated to the emotional and the cognitive. Nevertheless their importance has been recognized if only in a negative way, as, for example, in the interpretation of mysticism as a suppression of the individual will. Even those who regard a tendency toward quietism as an essential feature of mysticism are thereby giving recognition to the importance of the will in mysticism. We shall deal with the subject of quietism later, but here we may point out that the mystical tradition is by no means unanimous in assuming that ecstatic union requires a suppression of will. The writer of *The Cloud of Unknowing* declares of the mystical experience: "It is a swift piercing act, an act of direction, a naked intent of the will fastening itself upon God. For the sub-

⁴⁵ Henri Delacroix, *Etudes d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, chap. XII. Cf. Maréchal, *op. cit.* chaps. II and III, p. 125 ff. and p. 186 ff.

stance of all perfection is naught else but a good will." ⁴⁶ In recent years, largely due to the influence of Bergson, there has been an increasing tendency to interpret mysticism in voluntaristic terms. Like any tendency which represents a reaction against a contrary tradition, it has not always been discriminating. The contention that mysticism is essentially active, as one finds it for example in the writings of Miss Underhill, is based upon a deduction from a vitalistic philosophy rather than upon a scrupulous adherence to the empirical facts. A more careful study of the place of volitional factors in mysticism has been made by Howard H. Brinton in his book, *The Mystic Will*.⁴⁷ Here he proposes a classification of mysticism based upon the direction of the will. On this basis three types of mysticism may be recognized. (1) Outgoing, as in poetic nature mysticism like Wordsworth's and the intuitive or instinctive mysticism of Bergson. (2) The negative or contracting introspective mysticism displayed in the Upanishads and in quietists like Molinos. (3) A mysticism of life, in which the two movements of the will are combined in a circular process which passes through mystical phases. Brinton believes that this double character, which may be called this-worldly and other-worldly, is present in most Christian mystics but is harmonized most effectively by Jacob Boehme.

⁴⁶ Quoted by Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 336.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, chap. I.

The current emphasis upon volitional factors in mysticism may lead to a truer perspective provided that the other factors in mysticism are not overlooked or unduly subordinated to the volitional, and provided, of course, that one does not fall into the fallacy of making the will a separate faculty.

Perhaps the outstanding lesson we may derive from these diverse theories of mysticism is that mysticism itself is a diverse and varied group of phenomena. We should be falling into a verbal fallacy if we should assume that everything which has been called mysticism must manifest some common element or essence. Rather it would appear that the term has been applied to a number of distinctly different experiences, philosophies, and types of life. Yet it is probably just as impossible to work out an elaborate classification of varieties of mystical experience as we have found it to be in the case of religious experience. Any classification would be relative to certain interests and problems, but the number and complexity of the interests and purposes which are relevant to the understanding of mysticism (as of religious experience generally) are so great that no classification can be other than partial and oversimplified. The future study of mysticism should emphasize the varieties and attempt to analyze the factors which combine to influence and condition these various types.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Noteworthy contributions to the comparative study of mysticism have been made by R. Otto in his *Mysticism East and West* which

Two interrelated topics in the interpretation of mysticism call for more extended discussion before we turn to our final estimate of the cognitive and ethical value of mysticism. I refer to the factors of ineffability and immediacy, which are frequently regarded as among the most essential and distinctive features of the mystical experience. The ineffability of the mystical experience is constantly reiterated by the mystics. Concepts are inadequate to contain and words to express the intensity of feeling or the depth of significance which the mystic finds in his experience. But mysticism is by no means unique in this matter. The qualitative aspect of experience always escapes through the conceptual and verbal net. James, Otto, and Bergson are at one in their insistence that because of its inevitable abstractness conceptual thinking cannot do justice to the immediacies of experience. And they all propose something to make up for this deficiency. James's pragmatism, Otto's theory of ideograms, and Bergson's defense of intuitive instinct are all designed to accomplish this end.

Although the ineffability of mysticism is by no means a unique characteristic, it may be thought that the gap between the experience and the possibilities of expression is wider here than anywhere else. If mysticism is characterized by an inadequacy in the indi-

bears the significant subtitle, "A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism," and by J. Maréchal, particularly in chapters III and VI of his *Studies in the Psychology of Mysticism*.

vidual's system of responses, we can see that an acute ineffability is inevitably a striking characteristic, particularly of extreme mystical experience. The mystics are sometimes taxed with inconsistency because of their persistent and verbose attempts to express the inexpressible. It is sometimes said that the only consistent mystic is the Yogin, who remains silent in his enjoyment of Nirvana. Yet the very prolixity of the mystics, and especially their invention of new and sometimes bizarre terminology, may be taken as evidence of the truth of their unanimous declaration that all possible means of expression fall far short of the ecstasy itself. The question whether the quietist or the active mystic is more "consistent" cannot be decided by reference to ineffability alone but depends upon the character of the experience.

We have said that the ineffability of mystical experience is an aspect of its immediacy. From one point of view all experience is immediate. Every item in the passing show of conscious process may be grasped, enjoyed, or lived through simply for what it is in itself. This is immediacy in its primary and positive significance. Usually, of course, we take the items of our experience not simply for what they are in themselves but in their meanings and connections. This mediating process is the offspring of interest and purpose, while immediate enjoyment is the fruit of disinterested contemplation. The two functions may take place side by side in experience or one may

that the feelings of illumination or certitude which may accompany the birth of an hypothesis are no guarantee of its truth. We must admit that a certain presumption of validity may attach to the intuition of an expert, but this is not because of the way it comes but because of the quality and range of experience which is summed up in it. In so far as mysticism is immediate it is not cognitive, and in so far as it is cognitive it is not immediate.

Our final task in the evaluation of mysticism is to understand its relation to morality and the quest for the good life. The problem here can be approached in terms of the traditional distinction between the contemplative life and the active life. As Dom Cuthbert Butler remarks, the history of this distinction and the problems to which it gives rise has not yet been written, but this learned Benedictine has himself made a valuable contribution to it,⁴⁹ and the task has been carried forward by Kenneth E. Kirk in *The Vision of God*. The underlying problems are complex and cannot be answered simply in terms of the traditional question whether the active or the contemplative life is higher. We need also to ask what is the relation between the two. In what respects is action a hindrance or a help to contemplation and vice versa? Is there some form of life in which the distinction is in some way overcome? And if so, what is the relation between its two ingredients at this new level?

⁴⁹ E. Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism*. Cf. esp. pp. 259 ff.

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crowd the other into the background for the time. But it is important to see that what is called immediacy does not involve the total suppression of all mediate functioning or discursive thinking. Furthermore the objects of our immediate experience by no means remain the same, but take on new meaning as they acquire connections in experience. And these new meanings which begin as extrinsic gradually become "telescoped" into the original object, and thus constitute it a richer object of immediate contemplation. This derived "immediacy" in a sense is the outcome of thinking and purposeful activity. It represents an enrichment of the contemplative side of experience through interpenetration with the active. In mystical experience, contemplation crowds discursive thinking far into the background, and possibly for a time completely out of consciousness, but the structure of meanings possessed by the individual cannot be crowded out but remains to condition both the experience itself and its subsequent interpretation. Indeed it is this structure of meaning which protects the mystic from psychic dissociation and prevents the experience from lapsing into mere monoideism or unconsciousness. Thus we can say that the immediacy of mystical experience is rarely if ever "pure" in the sense of a complete elimination of meaning.

The cognitive significance of mystical immediacy or contemplation has often been misunderstood. It is clear that the contemplative or mystical factor or

moment in experience is an essential part of the cognitive process, conceived not as the acquisition of new facts but as growth in understanding. By itself, however, it is not primarily cognitive at all, but æsthetic. Nothing could be more unfortunate for the understanding either of mysticism or of knowledge than to detach contemplation from discursive reasoning and to regard it as a rival or superior mode of cognition.

The problem of the relationship of mysticism and cognition is complicated, not only by the fact that there are diverse types of mystical experience but also because of wide differences in the usage of terms like knowledge and cognition. These terms may be used in a relatively narrow and specific sense to designate those moments of the life process directly concerned with the solution of problems, or they may be used in a wider sense to include their contexts. Now the fact that mystical experience is predominantly immediate means that mysticism is more concerned with the contextual moments of the cognitive process than with the moments which are specifically cognitive. Yet there is one phase of cognitive effort which may be profoundly mystical, namely, the moment when the solving idea or hypothesis takes form and dawns upon the mind. If it comes as an "illumination" or "inspiration," it is rightly called mystical; it is an example of that kind of intuition that Bennett has shown to be the characteristic mystical type. Yet it is clear

that the feelings of illumination or certitude which may accompany the birth of an hypothesis are no guarantee of its truth. We must admit that a certain presumption of validity may attach to the intuition of an expert, but this is not because of the way it comes but because of the quality and range of experience which is summed up in it. In so far as mysticism is immediate it is not cognitive, and in so far as it is cognitive it is not immediate.

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In Eastern mysticism, both in Hinduism and Buddhism, there has been little question of the superiority of contemplation. Contemplation has generally been conceived in terms of the extreme forms of mysticism and has been thought to stand in the sharpest contrast to the life of practical activity. It is true that the Yoga methods cultivated in both these religious communities have involved strenuous discipline and control of activity in the interest of mystical experience. It would not be true to say, therefore, that activity was conceived absolutely as a hindrance to mystical experience; but this preliminary discipline was less a moral preparation than a physical and ritual cultivation of specific states and experiences. The effort was directed to the diminution of activity and the elimination of the consequences of activity in the interest of a passive contemplation. These states were cultivated for their own sake or as approximations to the complete detachment of Nirvana. Nevertheless, the prevailing "negativity" of Oriental mysticism can easily be misconceived and exaggerated. It is by no means uniform, but is rather a pervasive and deep-seated temper of mind which permits a wide variety of manifestations.

In the West the relation of contemplation and activity has been much more of a problem, the discussion of which has occupied a large place in the literature of mysticism. In general there has been a tendency to regard contemplation as higher than ac-

tivity, but the contrast between the two has rarely been drawn as sharply in the West as in the East. The two lives have often been symbolized by Leah and Rachel or Martha and Mary, and it was generally agreed that Mary had chosen the better part. The fact that mystical contemplation was regarded as a foretaste of the heavenly vision tended to insure its assignment to the higher rank. The immense influence of Neoplatonism upon Christian mysticism operated in the same direction, and it is possible that Neoplatonism was influenced by Indian mysticism. But even Neoplatonism, which is sometimes blamed for introducing Oriental negativity into the mystical tradition of the West, was more positive than the Oriental type, for as Maréchal says, "it gave to the sympathetic contemplation of the Beautiful and the continued pursuit of moral Good a prevailing part in the ascent of the soul towards God."⁵⁰ But Western mystics have usually interpreted contemplation in a broader sense than mystical experience, and moral purification has been regarded as the essential mode of preparation for the vision of God. The cultivation of mystical states for their own sake has been frowned upon, not only by the Church but by many of the mystics themselves. Most important of all there has been a well-nigh unanimous recognition of the importance of moral tests of the validity of states of contemplation. The significant point here is not the

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 314.

unjustified assumption that the purity of the mystic's love guarantees the truth of his visions, but that it witnesses to the belief that there is a positive relation between contemplation and action.

This conviction also underlies the tendency to regard some form of mixed life as more worthy, or at least as more suitable to the conditions of this world, than either contemplation or activity alone. It underlies Eckhart's paradoxical preference for Martha over Mary on the ground that the former had learned her lesson while the latter still needed instruction. But this life and the relation between its two ingredients have been conceived in different ways. Perhaps the most common form is the recognition of an inevitable alternation between contemplation and activity. In earlier periods practical activity was often looked upon as a necessary interruption of and respite from the spiritual ardors of mystic flights into the Empyrean, while in modern times the rôles have been reversed and periodic mystic withdrawals have been advocated as a means of recuperating energies for practical tasks and responsibilities. Certain modern writers on mysticism, notably W. E. Hocking and Charles A. Bennett, have maintained that the "principle of alternation" expresses the essential teaching of Western mysticism, and that through it mysticism makes its real contribution to life.

Others, for example, Delacroix and Miss Underhill, claim that contemplation alone or an alternation be-

tween it and activity represent inferior forms or stages of the mystic quest. According to Delacroix the true mystic aspires beyond ecstasy to a total transformation of the personality.

"Christian mysticism substitutes for ecstasy a wider state: where the permanent consciousness of the Divine does not suspend practical activity, where definite action and thought detach themselves from this indefinite ground, where the disappearance of the feeling of self-hood and the spontaneous and impersonal character of the thoughts and motor-tendencies inspire the subject with the idea that these acts do not emanate from him, but from a divine Source: and that it is God who lives and acts within him." ⁵¹

Elsewhere he says: "The development of passivity, the abolition of the feeling of self, do away with that distinction and that alternation. In a kind of total automatism, they realize an impersonal and uniquely divine life." ⁵² Leuba criticizes Delacroix, however, for overemphasizing the elements of passivity and loss of consciousness of self in this stage, and Bennett maintains that "the necessity for the alternation lies deep in the nature of knowledge and of morality, and indeed pertains to our constitution as finite beings." ⁵³ Delacroix is treading on dangerous ground when he places such high valuation upon a state which he calls

⁵¹ *Etudes d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, p. xi. Quoted by E. Underhill, *The Mystic Way*, p. 302.

⁵² Henri Delacroix, *Etudes d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, p. 423. Quoted by J. H. Leuba, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁵³ Charles A. Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 47, 48.

an automatism, and Bennett is doubtless right when he suggests that there can hardly be a complete fusion of contemplation and action under the conditions of this life. Professor E. W. Lyman is on sounder ground when he suggests that the "principle of alternation" should be supplemented by a "principle of interpenetration," for here there is a recognition of the necessity of conscious control of the complementary factors in the good life.⁵⁴

What are the grounds of this higher evaluation of practical and ethical activity in Western mysticism, and of the view expressed by many of the great Christian mystics that what has been received in contemplation should be expressed in action? Those who regard mysticism as essentially negative and quietistic, for example, Friedrich Heiler, say that it is because Christian mysticism is not pure mysticism, but is mixed with prophetic religion. Rufus Jones and Miss Underhill contend, on the contrary, that except for the baleful influence of Neoplatonic speculations, mysticism is manifested in its highest and truest form in these active Christian mystics. Maréchal, however, recognizes the existence of different types of mysticism resulting from the interplay of diverse metaphysical and psychological factors, and this would seem to be the more defensible position.

The question may be asked, is there anything in mysticism as such which impels the more active Chris-

⁵⁴ E. W. Lyman, *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*, pp. 94-99.

Nevertheless, for purposes of analysis and communication it is doubtless necessary to fasten upon certain examples and characteristics of mystical experience and to refer to them as the distinctively mystical elements in religion. In this sense we may agree with Von Hügel and those like him who speak of the "mystical element" in religion and the need of its being balanced and controlled by institutional, rational, and ethical elements. For Von Hügel the errors and weaknesses often attributed to mysticism (such as quietism, pantheism, and withdrawal from the actual and temporal world) spring from "exclusive mysticism," that is, "an attempt to make mysticism to be the all of religion" or "the contention that mysticism does constitute such an entirely separate, completely self-supported kind of human experience." The validity and strength of mysticism, on the other hand, depend upon "a readiness to keep it as but one of the elements more or less present in, and necessary for, every degree and form of the full life of the human soul."⁵⁶

We conclude that mysticism is to be regarded, not as a separate and distinct type of religious experience but as a group of related ingredients or tendencies which may be present in various forms and intensities in many sorts of religious experience. In some types of religious experience mystical elements may be pres-

⁵⁶ Friedrich Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. II, pp. 283-291.

an automatism, and Bennett is doubtless right when he suggests that there can hardly be a complete fusion of contemplation and action under the conditions of this life. Professor E. W. Lyman is on sounder ground when he suggests that the "principle of alternation" should be supplemented by a "principle of interpenetration," for here there is a recognition of the necessity of conscious control of the complementary factors in the good life.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ E. W. Lyman, *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*, pp. 94-99.

excessive leisure available to the classes who formulated and have maintained it.⁵⁵ The Western mystic is conditioned by climate, race, and cultural tradition to place a higher value upon social life and practical activity. He holds, not merely theoretically but in such a way that it conditions his experience, a conception of God as active, loving Will. Furthermore, it would be hard to exaggerate the influence of the teaching and example of Jesus upon the thought and practice of practically all Christian mystics. Some would maintain that these are extra-mystical influences which tend to prevent mysticism itself from attaining its pure form and characteristic development. But this and similar oversimplified solutions of the problem rest upon an abstract and narrow view of mysticism. As a matter of fact these factors enter into and condition mystical experience itself, and hence they are integral to one or another of various types of mysticism. An individual may, if he chooses, define mysticism by certain abstract psychological marks or by a particular metaphysical doctrine such as acosmic pantheism and the annihilation of the ego in the All, but such definitions are arbitrary and partial. Whenever something called pure mysticism, mysticism as such, or the like, is thus narrowly defined and singled out either for praise or blame, we may suspect that what is in question is an artificial construction or an arbitrary selection from the facts.

tian mystics to expend their abundant energies in the service of their fellow men, or did the impulsion come from sources outside their mysticism? This question raises an extremely fundamental and crucial problem. Some mystics, including a majority of Oriental mystics and a minority from the West, hold that the highest form of life is contemplation divorced from action. They tend toward acosmic pantheism, the annihilation of personality, pessimism, passivity, quietism, and apathy. Other mystics, mostly Western and Christian, hold that the highest form of life is an alternation or a synthesis of contemplation and action. They believe in a God both immanent and transcendent. Their tendencies toward pessimism are corrected by an ultimate optimism. They believe in the transformation of personality, and they devote themselves to loving service of their fellows.

How are these differences to be accounted for? Unquestionably they are determined in part by the temperamental differences between mystics and in part by what they have received from the socio-cultural environment. Among the factors which determine the type to which any individual mystic may tend are his fundamental scale of values, his metaphysical and theological convictions, his code of ethical obligations, his temperamental bias and outlook. The main tendencies of Oriental mysticism are doubtless determined in part by the hot and enervating climate of India where it originated, and by the

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Nevertheless, for purposes of analysis and communication it is doubtless necessary to fasten upon certain examples and characteristics of mystical experience and to refer to them as the distinctively mystical elements in religion. In this sense we may agree with Von Hügel and those like him who speak of the "mystical element" in religion and the need of its being balanced and controlled by institutional, rational, and ethical elements. For Von Hügel the errors and weaknesses often attributed to mysticism (such as quietism, pantheism, and withdrawal from the actual and temporal world) spring from "exclusive mysticism," that is, "an attempt to make mysticism to be the all of religion" or "the contention that mysticism does constitute such an entirely separate, completely self-supported kind of human experience." The validity and strength of mysticism, on the other hand, depend upon "a readiness to keep it as but one of the elements more or less present in, and necessary for, every degree and form of the full life of the human soul."⁵⁶

We conclude that mysticism is to be regarded, not as a separate and distinct type of religious experience but as a group of related ingredients or tendencies which may be present in various forms and intensities in many sorts of religious experience. In some types of religious experience mystical elements may be pres-

⁵⁶ Friedrich Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. II, pp. 282-291.

ent in a definitely subordinate position. The Hebrew prophets, for example, exhibit certain mystical tendencies, such as a sense of presence or guidance, visions and auditions, or even ecstasy. But they were far from being "exclusive mystics" in Von Hügel's sense; the mystical factors in their experience were united with non-mystical elements, such as a strong and dramatic sense of history, with the result that their experiences manifest a unique and characteristic tone. It is for this reason that they have sometimes been classed as mystics of a peculiar sort and sometimes as prime examples of a type of religious experience standing in sharp contrast with mysticism.

We should admit without hesitation that there are types of religious experience in which no mystical element is present. This is entailed by our conclusion that the term religious experience properly bears a collective and neutral sense rather than a restricted and partial meaning. If there is no adequate ground for restricting the meaning of the term religious experience to any of the narrower senses which we have examined, there is likewise no justification for limiting its denotation to the sphere of mysticism.

It may be objected that with such a broad and indefinite meaning the term religious experience will lose a great deal of its appeal. This conclusion may be admitted; indeed there is reason to believe that the term has to a considerable degree outlived its usefulness. Its popularity has rested in large measure upon

its vagueness and ambiguity. It has carried comforting suggestions of underlying agreements and impregnable certainties, but these are likely to disappear upon examination. The appeal to religious experience as a solution of religious problems is often a merely verbal technique which leaves the problems exactly where they were. The term suggests an unduly individualistic conception of religion and an oversimplified view of its psychological foundations.

There should be a general recognition of the fact that religious experience occurs not as a generalized essence but in particular forms. For this reason we can neither impugn nor defend the validity of religious experience in general, but must recognize that its specific forms are of widely varying validity and worth. Religious experience is not any one kind of experience with constant and characteristic marks. Its boundaries in general are elastic and variable, while in any particular culture their position is an important feature of the cultural pattern and is determined by many factors within that pattern. Religious experience is not a distinct form of cognition, but is dependent upon the cultural environment for its sources of insight and upon philosophical criticism for any claim which it makes to cognitive validity.

The formulation of a universal definition of religious experience is beset by the same difficulties as the attempt to define religion itself, for any definition which takes account of all its manifestations will be

too general to provide a means of distinguishing between religious and non-religious phenomena. The most satisfactory approach to a definition would be in terms, not of the immediate content or quality of certain experiences, but rather of function and cultural significance. More important than efforts at abstract definition, however, are statements of what is accounted significantly religious in experience which frankly admit their relativity to a particular standpoint and culture.

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